

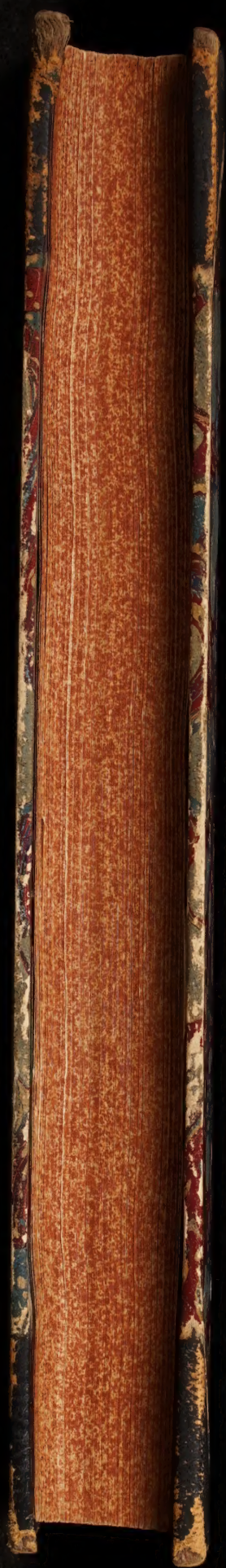




ESSAY  
ON  
PETRARCH



1730  
F. 14







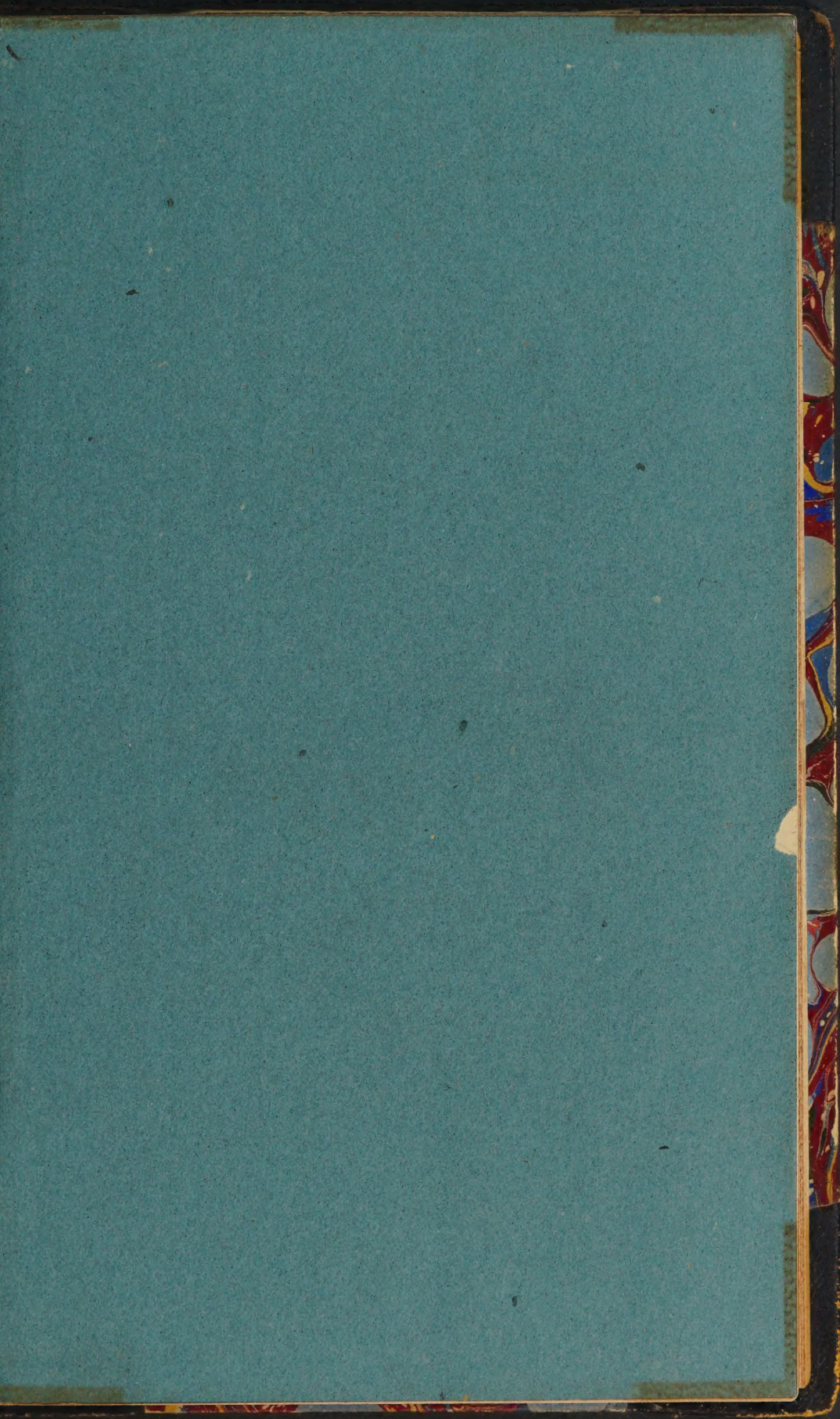




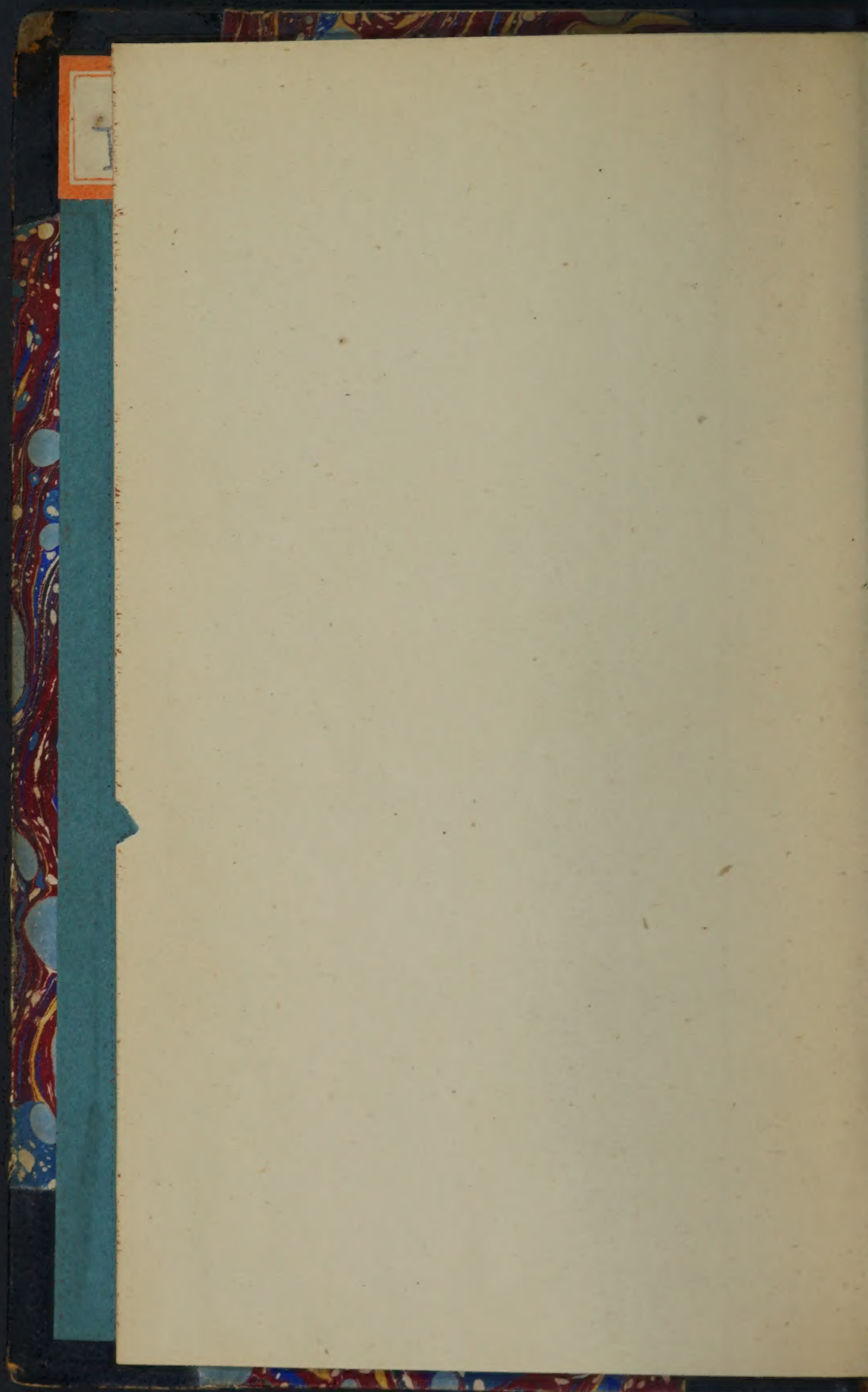


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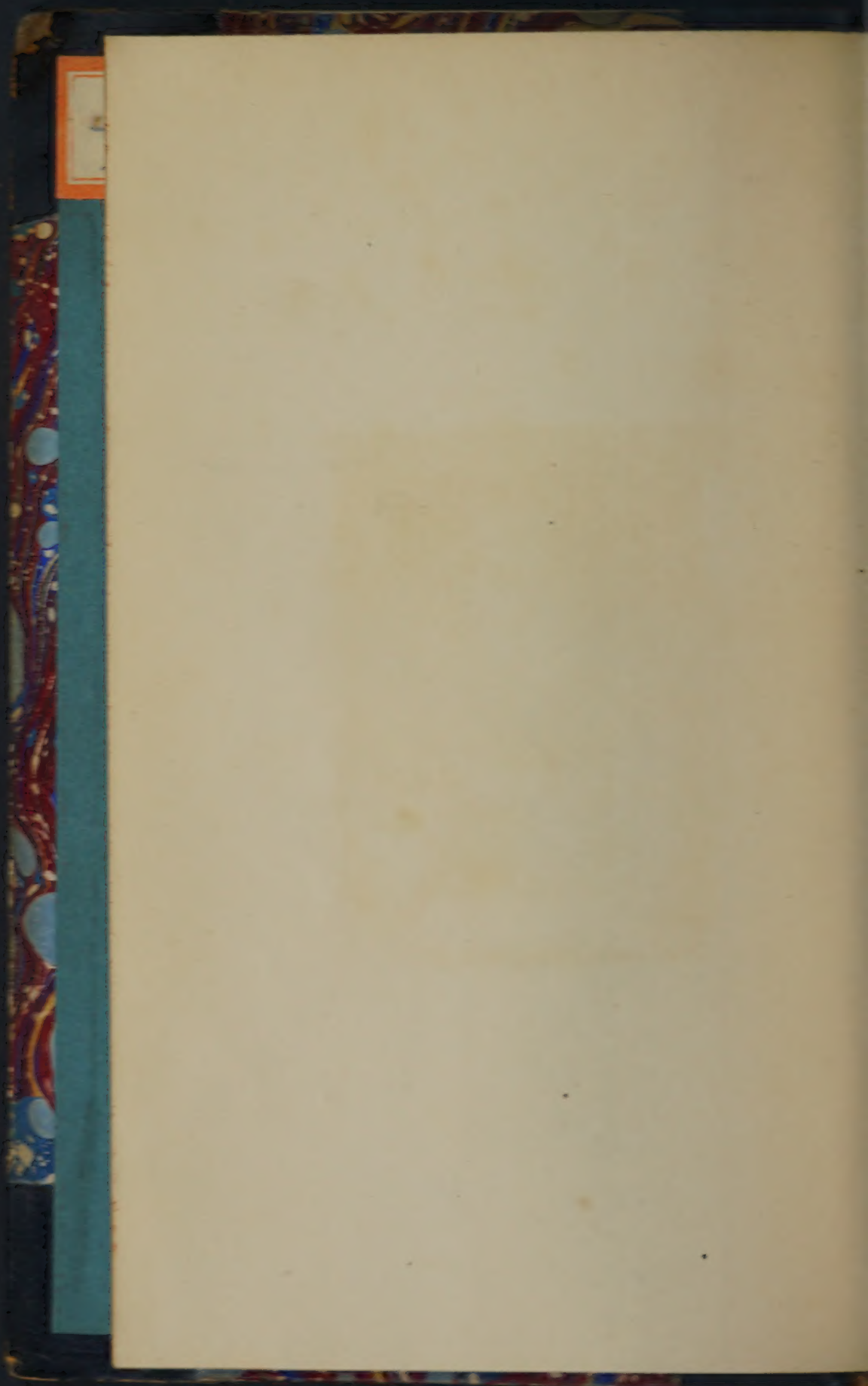




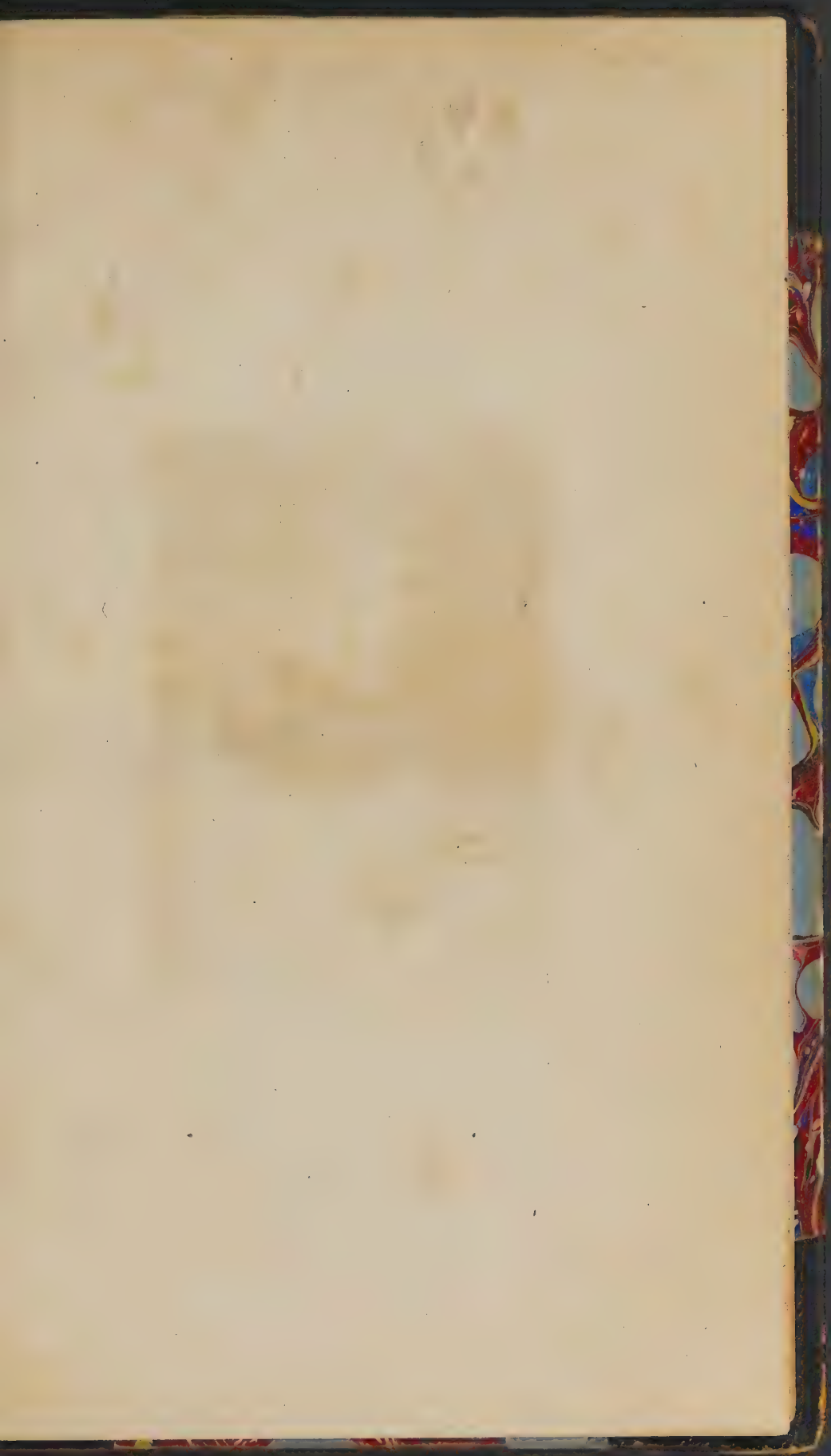














*Barthelemy puer.*

*R.H. Greville sculp.*

FRANCESCO PETRARCA.

*London: Published by John Murray, 25 Fleet Street. F. 1818.*





*From an ancient picture of Laura*

*London. Published by John Murray, 32, Fleet Street. Edib. 1801.*



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AN  
HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL  
ESSAY  
ON THE  
LIFE AND CHARACTER  
OF  
Petrarch.

WITH A TRANSLATION OF A FEW OF HIS  
SONNETS.

---

ILLUSTRATED WITH  
*PORTRAITS AND ENGRAVINGS.*

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*Woodhouselee, A. F. T.* ✓

EDINBURGH:  
Printed by James Ballantyne and Co.  
FOR JOHN BALLANTYNE AND CO. EDINBURGH;  
AND JOHN MURRAY, LONDON.

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1810.

44161



TO

THOMAS JAMES MATHIAS, Esq.

WHOSE CLASSICAL TASTE, AND CRITICAL ABILITIES,

DISPLAYED IN VARIOUS BRANCHES

OF POLITE LETTERS;

ARE IN A PARTICULAR MANNER

DISTINGUISHED

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ITALIAN LITERATURE;

THIS ESSAY,

WHICH, IN A MORE IMPERFECT FORM,

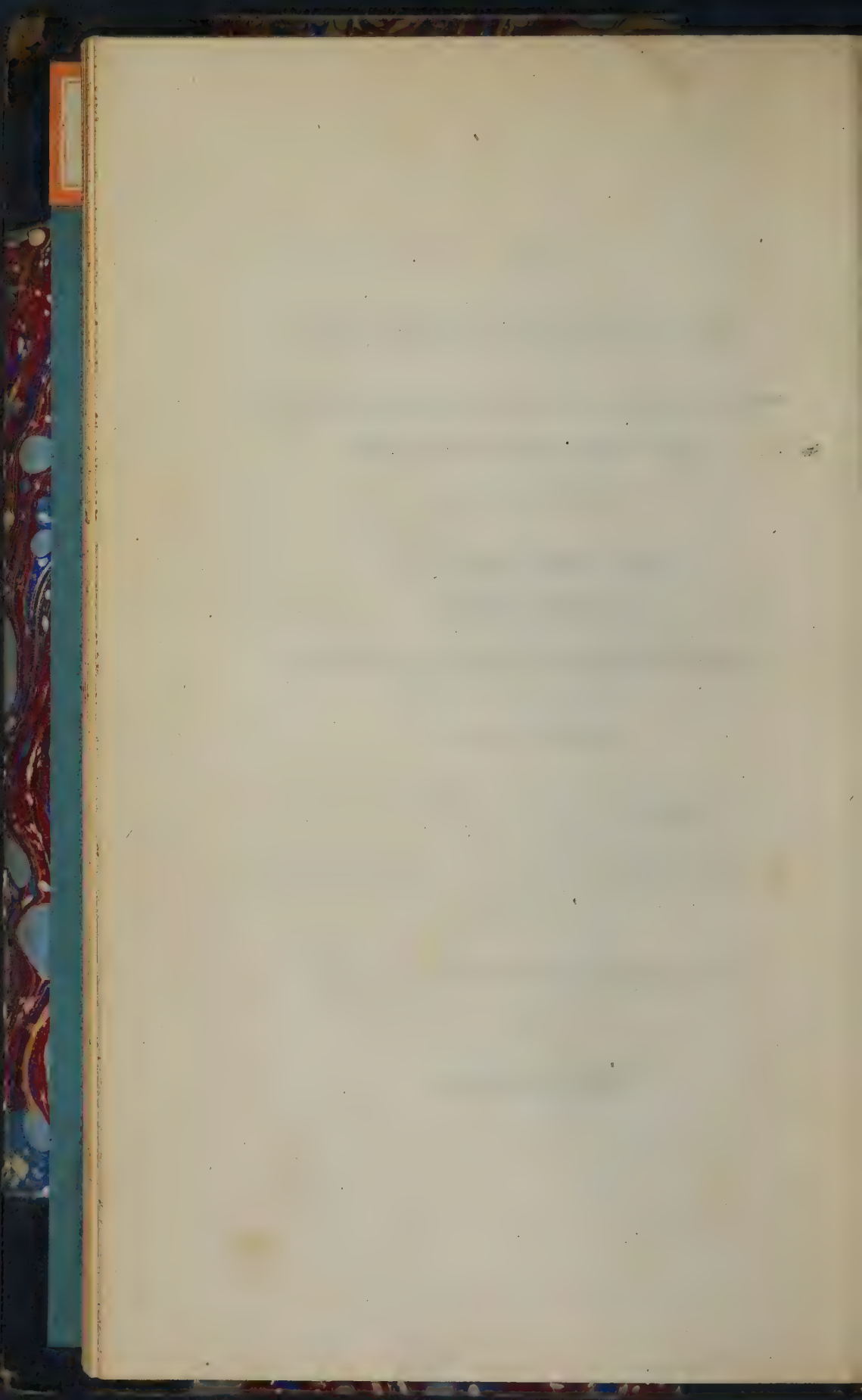
WAS HONOURED WITH HIS NOTICE AND APPROBATION,

IS INSCRIBED,

AS A MARK OF THE FRIENDSHIP AND ESTEEM

OF

THE AUTHOR.





## ADVERTISEMENT.

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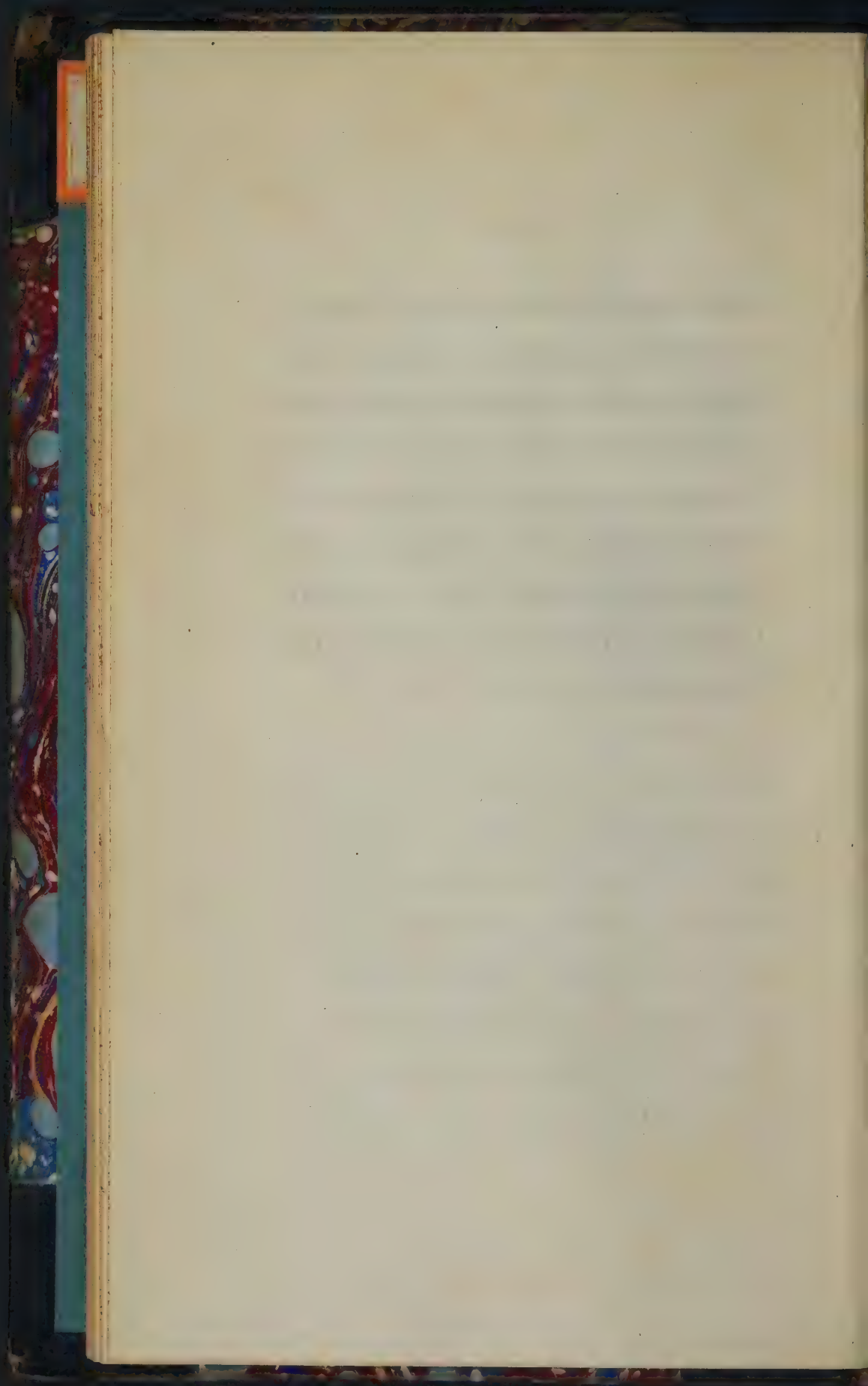
THE greater part of the following Essay appeared in two separate publications; the one, a small pamphlet, published twenty-five years ago, (in 1784,) with a title similar to the present; the other, a Dissertation on an Historical Hypothesis of the Abbé de Sade, which was printed in the fourth volume of the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. These two detached publications are, in the present work, new-

modelled, enlarged, and thrown into one continued Essay ; to which are subjoined, Translations into English Verse of a few of the Sonnets of Petrarch, which are referred to in the text, as illustrative of the principal argument and scope of the Essay.

If, under the circumstances above-mentioned, any apology should be thought necessary for the present publication, the author might alledge a motive which he felt too honourable to himself to be resisted ; namely, the approbation of several Italian gentlemen of distinguished literary talents and taste, who wished that what they considered as a



satisfactory vindication of their illustrious countryman, and a detection of some material errors in the common accounts of his Life and Character, should be presented to the public, with at least all the advantage which the author's revisal and corrections could bestow upon it.

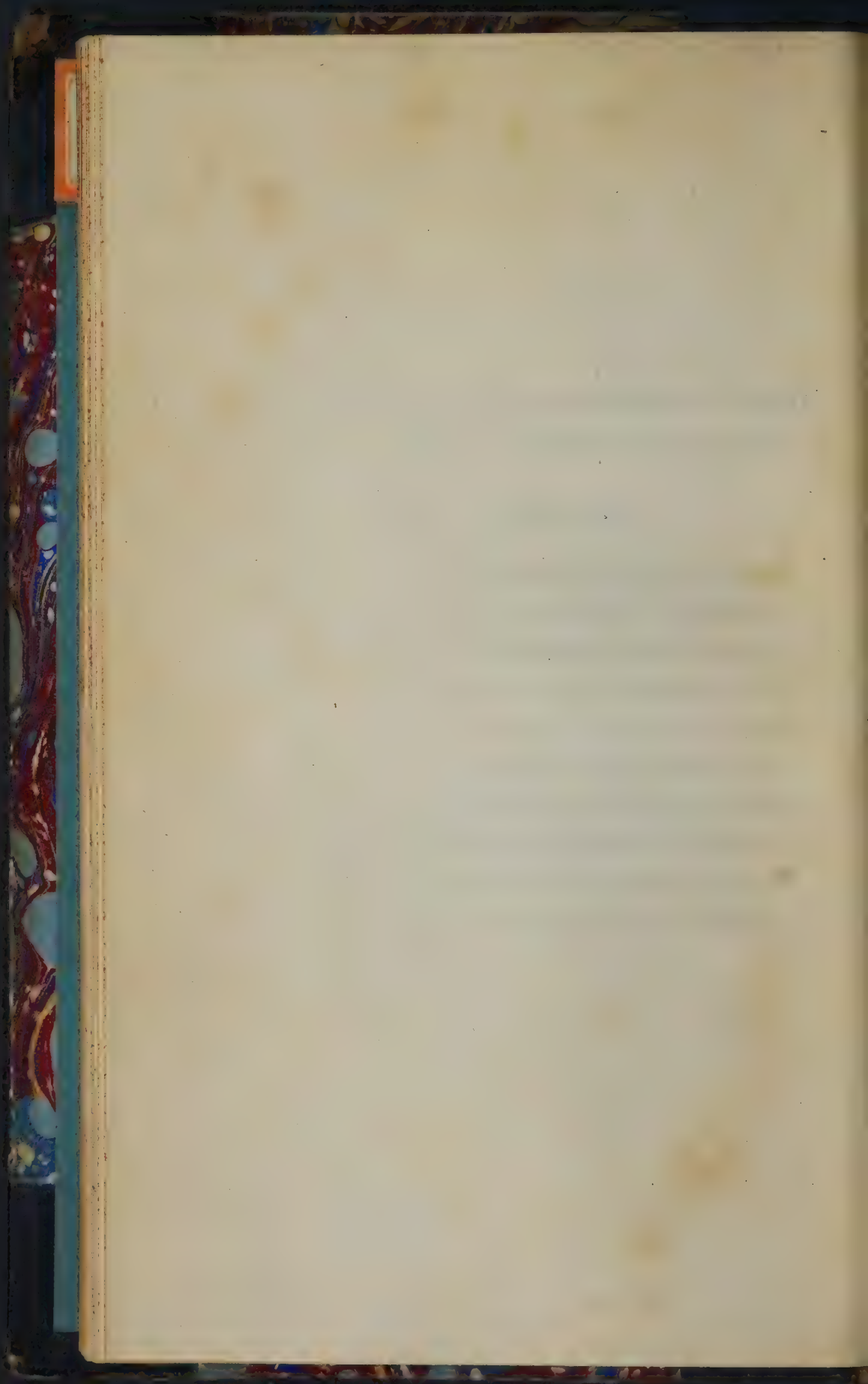




[From a Sonnet addressed to *Edmund  
Spenser*, by *Sir Walter Raleigh*.]

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*Methought I saw the grave where LAURA lay,  
Within that temple, where the Vestal flame  
Was wont to burn; and passing by that way,  
To see that buried dust of living fame,  
Whose tomb fair Love, and fairer Vertue kept,  
All suddenly I saw the Fairy Queen,  
At whose approach the soul of Petrarch wept,  
And from thenceforth those Graces were not seen,  
For they this Queen attended; in whose stead,  
Oblivion laid him down on LAURA's hearse.——*





ESSAY  
ON THE  
LIFE AND CHARACTER  
OF  
PETRARCH.

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*SECTION FIRST.*

THE literary world owes very high obligations to Francis Petrarch; and it has been laudably zealous in repaying them by a grateful tribute of admiration and encomium. There is no character among the moderns whose talents have been more the subject of panegyric, both among his contemporaries and with posterity; nor is there any whose life has so frequently employed the pen of the biographer. The Baron de la Bastie, one of the latest of

these writers, enumerates at least fourteen, and most of them authors of some reputation, who have professedly written biographical accounts of this eminent man;<sup>1</sup> not to mention a still more numerous class, who have incidentally treated of his life and literary character in critical dissertations, journals, and memoirs of the state of literature of his age and country.<sup>2</sup>

Amidst this variety of research, it is natural to suppose that much has been

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<sup>1</sup> The professed biographers of Petrarch, enumerated by this writer, are Paolo Vergerio, Xico Polentone, Leon. Aretino, Gianozzo Manetti, Phil. Villani, Rod. Agricola, Hieron. Squarzacchi, And. Schroedern, Lud. Beccatelli, Pap. Masso, Jac. Ph. Tomasini, Aless. Vellutello, J. And. Gesualdo, M. Muratori.

<sup>2</sup> De Petrarcha tam multa et a tam multis missa sunt in litteras, pugnantia etiam quædam, et minus accurata, ut vel nomina scriptorum referre sit labor: *Fabric, Bibl. Med. et inf. Latin.*



brought to light, and, it is even a reasonable suspicion, that where there has been such ardour of investigation, there can remain but little subject of new discovery. So thought M. de la Bastie,<sup>1</sup> when, in the years 1740 and 1741, he published his excellent Account of the Life of Petrarch, in the *Memoires de l' Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*.<sup>2</sup> He was not

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<sup>1</sup> M. de Bimard, Baron de la Bastie, of an ancient family, was born at Carpentras, in the vicinity of Vaucluse; a circumstance which gave him a peculiar interest in the subject which he treated, as well as the best opportunity for local information. He was a member, both of the French Academy of Belles Lettres, and the Italian Academy of Cortona, and was in intimate correspondence with Muratori, Maffei, the Cardinal Quirini, and the chief of the learned men of Italy. His researches relative to the life of Petrarch are therefore of the highest authority, and his opinions entitled to the greatest weight.

<sup>2</sup> Vols. xv. and xvii.

aware, that, within a few years from the date of his own publication, the world was to receive a work, containing at least ten times the quantity of all that had ever been written on the subject of Petrarch, and professing to be only *materials* for the composition of a life of this remarkable man. The work I here allude to, is *Mémoires pour la Vie de Pétrarque*, by the *Abbé de Sade*; a book which has met with considerable approbation from the public, and which merits the praise it has obtained; as, along with a very minute detail of the life of Petrarch himself, and a very full account of his writings, it contains a great deal of curious and instructive information relative both to the literary and political history of the times which it commemorates. In a work extended to three large volumes in quar-



to, and which has been the fruit of the most elaborate research, not only into all the printed works illustrative of the manners and history of the 14th century, but into public records, and the archives of private families, it cannot be denied, that much new light has been thrown on the principal object of that research, the *history and character* of Petrarch. But it will be a matter of regret to many readers, that the consequence of these elaborate inquiries, should be a diminution of that esteem which the world has hitherto entertained for this eminent man, in the most important point of his character, his *morals*.<sup>1</sup>

In order to be the better enabled to de-

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<sup>1</sup> Of this work of the Abbé de Sade, Mrs Dobson

cide upon the truth or falsehood of that hypothesis of the Abbe de Sade, thus injurious to the character of Petrarch, I shall, before proceeding to an examination of the grounds on which it rests, exhibit, in a short detail, the principal outlines of the poet's life.

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*FRANCIS PETRARCH*, was born in Tuscany, in the year 1304. His descent was not illustrious, though his family was ancient and respectable.<sup>1</sup> His

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has given a very good epitome, in her *Life of Petrarch*, 2 vols. 8vo.

<sup>1</sup> Per quello ch' egli medesimo scrive, fu de' cittadini di Firenze, di non grande, nè vile, ma antica famiglia. Fa memoria di un suo bisavo detto Garcio, il quale visse 104 anni, sano; narrando quanto fosse buono e prudente; e come gli amici e la Republica si valessero del suo consiglio. Donde chiaramente si vede che fu per antico linaggio di Firenze. *Beccatelli Vita del Petrarca.*

parents were natives of Florence, where his father exercised the profession of a notary; but having, unfortunately for his family, taken a warm part in the great dispute for supremacy between the Papal and Imperial powers, which at that time, and for some ages, divided Italy, he was banished from Florence, with all those of the Ghibelline faction. His mother, less obnoxious than her husband to the prevailing powers, obtained leave to return to her native country, and carried her infant son along with her, to a small farm which they had at *Ancisa*, in the *vale of Arno*: but soon after, preferring a life of banishment with a husband whom she loved, she quitted the territory of Florence, and removed to Pisa, where the father of Petrarch had now taken up his residence.

The infant years of this illustrious poet



were not distinguished by any circumstance of note; but his genius discovering itself by degrees, his father very early destined him for a learned profession. By his advice, he undertook the study of the laws; and passed several years at the universities of Montpellier and Bologna, in hearing the lectures of the most celebrated professors in that science; in particular those of *Cino da Pistoia*, who was not only one of the ablest civilians and canonists, but one of the best poets of his age. The latter accomplishment had much more charms than the former in the eyes of his pupil; who, though endowed by nature with the best requisites to success in the profession of the law, a penetrating judgment, and a ready and animated elocution, found no congenial exercise for a warm and brilliant imagi-

nation in the heavy pages of Accursius and Bartolus. His hours of study were more frequently employed in the perusal of his favourite classics. He relates himself, that his father, incensed at what he thought a misapplication of his time, seized at once every classic author of which he was possessed, and threw them into the fire ; but the frantic grief which he expressed at that sight so mollified the good old man, that he hastily rescued Cicero and Virgil from the flames, and gave them back to his son ; remarking, that it was only the immoderate attachment to these authors which he blamed, and that the works of Cicero, if rightly used, were the best preparative to the study of the law. Petrarch acknowledges that the struggle between the strong propensity of his nature, and the will of a respected parent,

was the cause of many unhappy hours: but his father's death, which happened when he was about the age of twenty-two, put an end to the contest. <sup>1</sup>

The pope's court being then at Avignon, Petrarch, who had, while at college, contracted a strict intimacy with the bishop of Lombes, of the illustrious family of Colonna, and had passed a summer with him at his bishopric in Gascony, <sup>2</sup> was

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<sup>1</sup> Valde parentibus cupiebam obsequi, sed natura repugnabat.—Sensi frustra naturæ repugnari, quanto enim studio parentes mei egerint ut patrimonium aucturus, Ius Civile perdiscerem, in quo viventibus iis aliquantulum processit, ut autem mihi relictus sum, eò redii unde nunquam animi intentione discesseram. Petr. Basil Ed. p. 461.

<sup>2</sup> Petrarch delighted in the recollection of the agreeable manner in which the bishop and he passed their time in this solitary residence at the foot of the Pyrenees. “*In Vasconiam deductus, sub collibus Pyreneis, æstatem prope calestem multâ et domini,*



afterwards kindly solicited to reside with him in the house of his brother, the Cardinal Colonna, then at Avignon. This invitation he accepted. His shining talents, joined to the most amiable manners, procured him the favour and esteem of many persons in power and eminent station; and he found, in the house of the cardinal, an agreeable home, where he enjoyed the sweets of an affectionate society, with every convenience he could desire for the indulgence of his favourite studies.

At a season of life, when the tenderest of the human passions is in its greatest

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*et comitum jucunditate transegi; ut semper tempus illud memorando suspirem. Inde rediens, sub fratre ejus Joanne de Columna Cardinale, multos per annos, non quasi sub domino, sed cum patre, imò ne id quidem, sed cum fratre amantissimo, imò mecum, et propriâ meâ in domo fui." Petr. Epist. de vit. suâ.*

force, Petrarch became its most illustrious votary. On the morning of Good Friday, in the year 1327, he saw for the first time the young and beautiful Laura :

Era'l giorno ch'al sol si scoloraro  
Per la pietà del suo fattore i rai,  
Quand' io fui preso,——

Son. 48. Part. 1.

<sup>1</sup> Padre del ciel dopò i perduti giorni, &c.

Son. 48. Par. 1.

She was then only in the thirteenth year of her age, and he in the twenty-fourth. Although in the numberless verses which he composed in the ardour of his passion, he has expatiated on every feature of his beautiful mistress, it is perhaps impossible thence to describe accurately either her person, or her face ; for the rapturous descriptions of a poet seldom convey pre-

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See a translation of this sonnet at the end,  
“ *Father of Heaven,*” c.

eise or distinct ideas. The impression which painting conveys of a beautiful form is much stronger and more complete. In those pictures of Laura, which have the best claim to authenticity, she is represented as of a fair complexion, her hair of a light colour, her face round and full, with a small forehead. She is commonly painted with her eyes cast down, so as to appear almost closed. The expression of the whole figure is that of a very young girl, of amiable ingenuity of countenance, much sweetness of disposition, and extreme bashfulness.<sup>2</sup> The most excessive modesty and reserve in her demeanour seems indeed to have been the strongest characteristic of the mistress of Petrarch. It was this quality, which, in the eyes of her lover, heighten-

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<sup>2</sup> See the *Postscript* to this Essay.



ed every charm of her person, and every accomplishment of her mind ; and it is more than probable, that to this attractive attribute, were owing both the ardour and the duration of his affection. Had the object of his passion been formed in the same mould with the greater part of her sex ; had she been endowed with a frame and temperament susceptible of a warm impression from the assiduous attentions of an amiable and accomplished man, the lover might have early gained the due reward of his services, in the possession of the object of his wishes ; but the world would have lost the best fruits of his poetical genius, and the poet himself an abundant source of refined enjoyment :—for it is not to be denied that Petrarch cherished his sorrows ; that he felt a positive pleasure in the indulgence of a tender melan-

choly; and that even a favoured passion for a less exalted character (as he owns himself) would have given him far less genuine enjoyment, than the rigour, not unallayed with hope, which he experienced from his lovely mistress :

Pur mi consola, che languir per lei  
Meglio è che gioir d'altra.——

Son. 141. p. 1.

One thought is comfort,---That her scorn to bear  
Excels even prosperous love, with other earthly fair.

Yet it is not to be doubted, that, reserved and apparently cold as was the usual demeanour of Laura, her heart sympathised

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<sup>1</sup> See a translation of this sonnet, at the end, "Ill-omen'd was that star's malignant gleam." It may be here incidentally remarked, that the beautiful thought in Shenstone's epitaph on Miss Dolman, *Quanto minus est cum reliquis versari, quam tui meminisse*, has, in all probability, this passage of Petrarch for its prototype.

with Petrarch; and, under the becoming restraint of maiden coyness, gave him at times abundant testimony of a reciprocal affection. The verses of the poet bear witness of this in many places; <sup>1</sup> where he expatiates with rapture on those expressions of regard, <sup>2</sup> which, in a favoured hour,

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<sup>1</sup> In the *Trionfo della Morte*, the poet makes Laura thus express herself with regard to the place of her birth, which she calls *umil terreno*, in comparison with the country of Florence, where her lover was born :

Duolmi ancor veramente ch'io non nacqui  
Almen più presso al tuo fiorito nido ;  
Ma assai fu bel paese ov'io ti piacqui.

<sup>2</sup> Chinava a terra il bel guardo gentile,  
E tacendo dicea (come a me parve)  
Chi m'allontana il mio fedele amico ?

Son. 99. p. 1.

I piansi, hor canto; che'l celeste lume  
Quel vivo sole a gli occhi miei non cела.

Son. 195. p. 1.



she would sometimes bestow upon him : small indeed, and unimportant expressions to insensible and vulgar minds ; and valued only by those on whom nature has bestowed the most pleasing, though often the most fatal of her gifts, a heart that feels alike the highest refinement of pleasure and of pain. It was in these moments, without doubt, that he composed those few of his sonnets, which are expressive of a temporary happiness. <sup>1</sup>

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Così carico d'oblio  
 Il divin portamento  
 E'l volto, e le parole, e'l dolce riso  
 M'havéano, e si diviso  
 Da l'immagine vera,  
 Ch'i dicea sospirando,  
 Qui come venii' io, o quando?  
 Credendo esser in ciel, non là dov' era.

Canz. 27.

<sup>1</sup> Benedetto sia'l giorno, e'l mese e'l anno  
 E la stagione, e'l tempo, e'l hora, e'l punto

Abandoned to the excess of his passion, and incapable of bestowing attention on any other object than his beloved Laura, it is no wonder that the mind of Petrarch became at times a prey to melancholy. He felt, as every ingenuous spirit, the spur of a laudable ambition, to

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E'l bel paese, e'l loco, ov'io fui giunto  
Da duo begli occhi, che legato m' hanno.

Son. 47. p. 1.

Avventuroso più d'altro terreno  
Ov' amor vidi già fermar le piante,  
Verme volgendo quelle luci sante  
Che fanno intorno à se l'aere sereno.

Son. 85. p. 1.

Pien di quella ineffabile dolcezza,  
Che dal bel viso trasser gli occhi miei.

Son. 92. p. 1.

Di tempo in tempo mi si fa men dura  
L'angelica figura, e'l dolce riso, &c.

Ballatta 10. p. 1.

emerge from the obscurity of a private life; and he reflected with the deepest regret on the years he had fruitlessly consumed in painful anxiety, and in the neglect of every active and manly duty: and to these depressing reflections, he frequently gives vent, with all the warmth of unaffected anguish, in his beautiful verses. †

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' Voi ch' ascoltate in rime sparse il suono  
 Di quei sospiri, ond' io nudriva il cuore  
 In sul mio primo giovenil' errore—  
 Spero trovar pietà, non che perdono.  
 Ma ben veggì, hor, sì come al popol tutto  
 Favola fui gran tempo; onde sovente  
 Di me medesmo meco mi vergogno:  
 E del mio vaneggiar vergogna e'l frutto,  
 El pentirsi —————

Son. 1. p. 1.

See a translation of this sonnet, at the end: "Ye  
 " that with favouring ear," &c.

Padre del ciel, dopo i perduti giorni,  
 Dopo le notte vaneggiando spese —



In this temper of mind, he had the courage to make a vigorous effort to break his fetters. He left Avignon, and resolving on a long and distant journey, he made a tour for several months through France, Germany and Flanders; in the gratification, as he says, of a curiosity natural to youth; and, doubtless, in the hope that change of place, and variety of objects, might restore his peace of mind: but though thus increasing his fund of useful knowledge, the ardour of his passion was still unabated, and he returned to Avignon, to offer up at the shrine of his

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Piaciati homai col tuo lume ch'io torni

Ad altra vita.

Son. 48. p. 1.

See this sonnet likewise translated, "Father of Heaven," &c.

mistress, now more beautiful than ever, the confirmed attachment of a devoted heart.

In what manner Petrarch was received by Laura, on his return, we cannot with certainty affirm ; but it is probable it was his mortification to find, that, from her extreme reserve and coyness, he was yet far from obtaining the end of his wishes, and the reward of his long services. His fortunes wore an unpromising aspect ; the best years of his life were wearing fast away ; and the friendship of the great, though soothing to his self-love, had yet produced no beneficial consequence. Disgusted with the splendid delusions of ambition, and feeling no solid enjoyment but in the calm pursuits of literature and philosophy, he resolved at once to bid adieu

to the world;<sup>1</sup> and at the early age of thirty-four, he retired to the solitude of Vacluse, about fifteen miles from Avignon, where he purchased a small house and garden, the humble dwelling of a fisherman; a lonely but beautiful recess, which he has celebrated in many parts of his works. He informs us in one passage of his Epistles, that he first saw Vacluse,

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<sup>1</sup> That disappointed ambition was the true cause of Petrarch's retirement, appears from many passages of his writings; and he sought to disguise that feeling even from himself, by the usual apology of a proud spirit, that he could not stoop to those unworthy arts by which the favour of the great is secured, and preferment obtained. "*Mundi artes deerant, quibus hodie præsertim ad altos gradus ascenditur; ambiendi scilicet magnorum limina, blandiendi, promittendi, mentiendi, simulandi, dissimulandi-que; gravia et indigna quælibet patiendi.*———  
*Valeant magni honores, si his artibus acquiruntur.*"  
*Dial. de contemptu mundi.*



when he was a child of eight or nine years of age; and at that early period, his romantic imagination pictured to itself visions of future enjoyment in that charming retreat. "Here," said the young enthusiast, "is the place most suited to my nature; and which, should it ever be in my choice, I would prefer to the most splendid cities." *En naturæ meæ locus aptissimus, quemque, si dabitur, magnis uribus aliquando sim prælaturus. Senil. lib. x. ep. 2.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Description of Vacluse, by the Abbé de Sade.*  
—"Vacluse est un de ces lieux ou il semble que la nature aime à se montrer sous une forme singuliere. Dans cette belle plaine de *L' Isle*, qui ressemble à la vallée de Tempé du côté du levant, on trouve un petit vallon, terminé par un démicercle de rochers, d'une élévation prodigieuse, qu' on diroit avoir été taillées perpendiculairement. Le vallon est renfermé de tout côté par ces rochers, qui forment une espece

But the solitude of Vaucluse was probably sought by Petrarch, from a cause yet

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de fer-à-cheval, de façon qu'il n'est pas possible d'aller audelà; c'estce qui lui a fait donner le nom de Vaucluse, *Vallis clausa*. Il est partagé par une rivière entourée de prairies toujours vertes. A la rive gauche du fleuve on trouve un chemin, qui mene, en tournant un peu au fond de ce demicercle ou fer-à-cheval. La', au pied d'une masse enorme de roc qui menace le ciel, et qu'on voit en face, est un antre assez vaste creusé des mains de la nature, où l'on peut entrer quand la fontaine est basse, et dont l'obscurité a quelquechose d'effrayant. C'est une double caverne, dont l'exterieur a plus de soixante pieds de hauteur, sous l'arc qui en forme l'entrée. L'intérieur n'en a pas tout a fait la moitié. Elle paroît avoir cent pieds de large, et environ autant de profondeur. On trouve, vers le milieu de cet antre, un bassin ovale en forme de puits, dont le grand diamètre est de 45 pas, ou 18 toises. De là s'élève, sans jet ni bouillon, cette source abondante qui forme la Sorgue.---Dans l'état ordinaire de cette fontaine, l'eau passe par des conduits souterrains de son bassin dans le lit où elle commence son cours : mais dans le tems

more attractive than its romantic beauties. It was in that neighbourhood that Laura dwelt, whose image was for ever present

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de sa crue, qui arrive vers l' de Equinoxe du printemps, et quelquefois après des grandes pluies, elle s'élève au dessus d' une espece de mole qui est devant l'ancre, d' où elle se précipite avec un bruit épouvantable, entre des rochers, jusqu' à ce qu' étant arrivée à un endroit plus uni et plus profond, elle coule tranquillement et forme une riviere nommée Sorgue, capable de porter bateau à sa source, chose singuliere et unique. Elle se partage en plusieurs bras, qui après avoir arrosé une partie du *Comtat*, et reçu quelques ruisseaux, vont se jeter dans le Rhone près d' Avignon." *Mémoires pour la vie de Pétrarque, tom. 1. p. 341.*

It may be a relief to the reader of taste, after the dry detail of the preceding description, to view the same scenery as embellished by the hand of an elegant poet.

Quel cœur sans être ému, trouveroit Aréthuse  
Alphée, ou le Lignon: Toi sur tout, toi Vaucluse,  
Vaucluse, heureux séjour; que sans enchantement  
Ne peut voir nul poète, et surtout nul amant?



to his thoughts. Cabrieres, her father's country seat, and the place of her nativity, was within a short distance of the Sorga;

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Dans ce cercle de monts, qui, recourbant leur chaîne,  
Nourissent de leurs eaux ta source souterraine;  
Sous la roche voûtée, antre mystérieux,  
Où ta Nymphé echappant aux regards curieux,  
Dans un gouffre sans fond cache sa source obscure,

Combien j'aimois à voir ton eau, qui toujours pure,  
Tantôt dans son bassin renferme ses trésors  
Tantôt en bouillonnant s'élève, et de ses bords  
Versant parmi des rocs ses vagues blanchissantes  
De cascade en cascade au loin réjaillissantes,  
Tombe et roule à grand bruit; puis calmant son  
courroux,

Sur un lit plus égal répand des flots plus doux;  
Et sous un ciel d'azur, par vingt canaux féconde  
Le plus riant vallon qu'éclaire l'oeil du monde!  
Mais ces eaux, ce beau ciel, ce vallon enchanteur,  
Moins que Pétrarque et Laure intéressoient mon  
cœur.

La voilà donc, disois-je, oui, voilà cette rive,  
Que Pétrarque charmoit de sa lyre plaintive!

and there, at least in the months of summer, was probably her chief abode. The air of Vaucluse was therefore not fitted to abate the violence of his passion. "Here (says he, in one of his epistles) "the fire which consumed me, having its free course, the valleys, and even the air itself, resounded with my complaints. It

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Ici Pétrarque à Laure exprimant son amour,  
Voyoit naître trop tard, mourir trop tôt le jour.  
Retrouverai-je encor sur ses rocs solitaires  
De leurs chiffres unis les tendres caractères?  
Une grotte écartée avoit frappé mes yeux :  
Grotte sombre, dis moi si tu les vis heureux,  
M'écrai-je ! Un vieux tronc bordoit il le rivage?  
Laure avoit reposé sous son antique ombrage.  
Je redemandois Laure à l'Echo du vallon,  
Et l'Echo n'avoit point oublié ce doux nom.  
Partout mes yeux cherchoient, voyoient Pétrarque  
et Laure,  
Et par eux ces beaux lieux s'embellissoient encore.

*De Lisle, Les Jardins, ch. iii.*

was in that time that I composed those juvenile verses, which, being written in the warmth of my heart, are most grateful to those who are in a similar state of mind."

"*Flammâ cordis erumpente, miserabile, sed ut quidam dicebant, dulci murmure valles, cælumque complebam. Hinc illa vulgaria juvenilium laborum meorum carmina, quæ eodem morbo affectis, ut videmus sunt acceptissima.*" Petrarch has here expressed a very just sentiment: His sonnets and *canzoni* will always be estimated precisely according to the state of mind in which the reader peruses them. To relish them to the full extent, requires not only a congeniality of feeling, but a similarity of circumstances.

In this retreat Petrarch remained for several years; and having no avocation to



counteract the studious bent of his disposition, he turned his mind with earnest and successful application to the cultivation of literature. Maintaining an epistolary correspondence with most of the learned men who were his contemporaries, and having, through them, access to the best libraries, and the use of the most valuable ancient manuscripts, it was to the studies of Petrarch, the pains he took in copying with his own hand the ancient manuscripts, and the free use he made in his writings of Cicero, Virgil, Seneca, and the best of the Roman authors, that classical learning was mainly indebted for its revival in Europe, after a long night of ignorance and barbarism.

In the retirement of Vaucluse, Petrarch composed the most celebrated of his works, both in prose and verse. Of the latter

kind was his epic poem of *Africa*, in honour of the great Scipio;<sup>1</sup> a work which, in those times, was esteemed altogether prodigious. This poem, which is now little read, and which, though it abounds in matter, and is not destitute of poetic ornament, is in reality a tedious and uninteresting composition, was sufficient to procure for its author, the reputation of being the greatest poet of his time. Literary fame, in those days, must have depended on the opinion of a very few competent judges; for, as printing was not then

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<sup>1</sup> Petrarch, when composing his *Africa*, was not aware that the subject had been treated by the pen of an ancient classic, whose work was yet remaining. But the poem of *Silius Italicus*, was not recovered till 1415, when it was found by Poggio, in the monastery of St Gal, forty years after the death of Petrarch.

known, the circulation of a new work, by manuscript copies, must have been very slow, and extremely limited. It was therefore a singular proof of the celebrity of Petrarch, that he received on the same day, at his little hermitage of Vaicluse, an invitation from the senate of Rome and from the university of Paris, to accept of the laureate's crown. He hesitated to which of these flattering deputations he ought to give the preference. A patriotic feeling, joined to the advice of his friend the Cardinal Colonna, determined his choice in favour of Rome. Senuccio del Bene, a poet of Florence, who was an eyewitness of the solemnity of this inauguration, has left an account of it in his writings, from which it appears to have rivalled the pomp and pageantry of the ancient Roman triumphs. Petrarch, in a



velvet robe of violet colour, bound with a girdle of diamonds, was conveyed in a splendid car to the capitol; and there, amidst the acclamations of an innumerable multitude, was presented by the chief Senator with three crowns, of laurel, of ivy, and of myrtle. The dignity of Poet Laureate, which, from the scanty appearances of genius in those dark ages, had not been conferred for some centuries, was now revived in honour of Petrarch.

A short time after this event, happened the death of the Bishop Colonna, his early friend, and the most esteemed of his patrons: And, as if heaven had decreed that the era of his greatest glory should be succeeded by the sharpest affliction, the loss of his dearest friend, was followed soon after by the death of his lovely mistress. Laura died at Cabrieres, on the morning

of the 6th day of April, 1348, the same day, the same hour, when, twenty-one years before, she was first seen by Francis Petrarch.<sup>1</sup> If we credit what he has told in some of his sonnets, he foresaw for some time this melancholy event.<sup>2</sup> He relates that the image of Laura appeared to him in his sleep; not with a chearful countenance as usual; but pale and sorrowful; and with a melancholy voice, informed him, that he should never more see her

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<sup>1</sup> Sai ch' in mille trecenta quarantotto  
Il di sesto d' Aprile, in l' hora prima,  
Dal corpo uscio quell' anima beata.

Son. 290.

<sup>2</sup> Qual paura ho, quando mi torna a mente, &c.  
Son. 212. See a translation of this Sonnet, at the end. "*O Laura, when my tortur'd mind.*"

Solea lontana in suono consolarne, Son. 213.  
O misera e horribil visione, Son. 214.

upon earth. The presage was natural; for the pestilence was then raging in the territory of Avignon, and it was of that distemper that Laura died.

If words have force to convey a just idea of the grief of Petrarch, they are the words of the poet himself. Although he complains that the source of his genius was, from the time of that cruel event, dried up for ever,<sup>1</sup> yet the Sonnets and *Canzoni* which he composed after the death of Laura, are by far the most beautiful of his compositions. When he pathetically laments that his earliest friend and support, (*Colonna*, the prop and pillar of his fortunes) was torn from him by

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<sup>1</sup> Secca è la vena del usato ingegno,  
E la cetera mia rivolta in pianto.

Son. 353.



death;<sup>1</sup> that those eyes at which he first caught the fire of love, that face, those beauteous limbs, were now mouldering in the earth;<sup>2</sup> the heart must be hard indeed, that does not sympathise with him.

<sup>1</sup> Rotta è l' alta Colonna, e' l verde Lauro—  
Tolto m' hai, morte, il mio doppio tesauro.  
Son. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Gli occhi, di ch'io parlai si caldamente,  
E le braccia, e le mani, e i piedi, e' l viso,  
Che m'avean sì da me stesso diviso,  
E fatto singular da l'altra gente;  
Le cresse chiome d'or puro lucente,  
E'l lampeggiar del angelico riso,  
Che solean far in terra un Paradiso,  
Poca polvere son, che nulla sente.  
Son. 253.

See a translation of this Sonnet, at the end,  
" *Those eyes, whose living lustre shed the heat, &c.*"  
Quanta invidia ti porto avara terra,  
Ch' abbracci quella, cui veder m' 'e tolto.  
Son. 260.

See likewise, at the end, a translation of this Son-

Those sonnets *in morte di Madonna Laura*, are so beautifully varied, so tender, and so affecting, that they seem to have exhausted the whole powers of pathetic expression.

After the death of Laura, Petrarch sought, by mingling in active life, to wean his mind from the melancholy which overpowered him; but, if we credit his own account, it was without effect. Certain it is, however, that for many years after this period, we find him engaged with a keen interest in the political transactions of the times. After the extinction of the Colonna family, of whom the venerable father, Stephano Colonna, saw no less than seven of his sons, all men of eminent talents and consideration, de-

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net: "*O Earth, whose clay-cold mantle shrouds that face,*" and some others in a similar strain.

scend to the grave before him, Petrarch spent some years at Milan, where he devoted his services to the powerful family of the Visconti, the sovereigns of Milan; by whom he was greatly honoured, and frequently employed in state negotiations. He took a warm part in the extraordinary enterprise of Nicola Rienzi, who, on the wild pretence of restoring the ancient liberty of his country, usurped the government of Rome, under the title of Tribune; an enterprise which ended in his own destruction.<sup>1</sup> The ardent mind of Petrarch saw revived, as he thought, in this daring adventurer, the spirit of the Gracchi, or the younger Brutus: but the folly with which his favourite conducted himself during the short period of his eleva-

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<sup>1</sup> See Murat. Script. Ital. tom. xiii. and Vita di Rienzi.



tion, dispelled this patriotic vision. It is not, however, my purpose to detail the public life of Petrarch: A most ample account of its particulars may be found in the elaborate work of his biographer, the Abbé de Sade. One of those incidents, which, in the close of his life, gave him the most sensible pleasure, as furnishing strong testimony of the general estimation of his character, was the request of the citizens of Florence, who sent Boccaccio as their deputy, to intimate to him the restitution of his paternal estate in the Tuscan territory, which had been forfeited to the public by the political offence of his father; and to entreat he would honour Florence with passing his remaining years in that city, as the President of its newly instituted University. To this flattering embassy, he returned a suitable ex-

pression of his gratitude: but the love of studious retirement was, at this advanced period of his life, superior to every other consideration; and the request was not complied with.

Petrarch died in the 70th year of his age, on the 18th day of July, 1374, at Arqua, in the district of Padua. He enjoyed at his death several ecclesiastical preferments. He was canon of Lombes, archdeacon of Parma, and canon of the cathedral of Padua: but he was only a secular clergyman, and never entered into the order of priesthood.<sup>2</sup> The desire of preserving the entire command of his time, without any sacrifice of duty,

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<sup>1</sup> Chiara cosa è che mai non volle benefici curati, e per questo ricusò d'esser vescovo, essendogli più d'una volta offerto di farlo: ——— parendogli assai il render conto a Dio benedetto dell'anima sua, non che di quella d'altri. *Beccatelli vit. del Petrarca.*

was the reason for his declining a bishoprick, which was more than once offered to him by the Popes who were his contemporaries. He held, however, the office of domestic chaplain to Robert, King of Naples, and to his grand-daughter Queen Joanna; the former one of the most enlightened and virtuous of princes. In short, he lived respected, beloved, and honoured; and he died universally lamented.—There are two features of his character which do him the greatest honour: The one, that in an age of gross and general ignorance, when not only the scarcity of books, but the prejudices of his contemporaries opposed the cultivation of letters,<sup>1</sup> Petrarch, by the force of na-

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<sup>1</sup> Such was the ignorance and superstition, even of the higher clergy in those days, that one of the bishops made a formal complaint to Pope Clement VI. accusing Petrarch of the crime of magic; of



tive genius, surmounted those obstacles, and roused a passion for literature, which had the happiest influence on succeeding times: The other, that, with a singular moderation of mind, and the pride of an ingenuous spirit, though flattered by the friendship and the familiar correspondence of emperors and sovereign princes; though earnestly solicited to accept of the most honourable and lucrative employments; and though occasionally devoting

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which the proofs were, that he passed most part of his time in solitude, and was much addicted to reading Virgil. A very few years before this time, Pope John XXII. as we learn from his own letters, believed that his barber-surgeon used magical incantations, and made wax-pictures to torture him and take away his life; and the Countess of Foix having sent to his Holiness a *serpent's horn*, which had a miraculous virtue in discovering and defeating those charms, he prized it as an inestimable treasure. Reg. Joan. 22. Ep. 55.

his time and his talents to the service of his illustrious friends, and of the public, he continued through life to preserve his independence, and to prefer the pursuit of his favourite studies in retirement and tranquillity, to the allurements of the most splendid fortune.



*SECTION SECOND.*

THE works of Petrarch give evidence of his abilities as a politician, theologian, and philosopher; and it is in those characters that he appears chiefly to have been distinguished by his contemporaries; but it is not on these foundations that the lasting structure of his fame has been reared. It is to those beautiful verses, in which he has celebrated the accomplishments, and bewailed the fate of Laura, that Petrarch has been indebted for his permanent reputation. The history of the poet's passion for his lovely mistress, must ever be regarded as forming the most in-



teresting portion of his annals. His character, in fact, took its tone from that predominant affection, which influenced his studies, his habits of life, and all his pursuits and occupations. A love so pure, so ardent, and so lasting, is difficult to be paralleled in the history of human nature. Petrarch was the passionate admirer of Laura for twenty-one years, while she was in life; and with unabated ardour of affection, he is said to have bewailed her loss for twenty-six years after her death.

The works of the poet himself bear the strongest testimony that this passion, so remarkable both for its fervency and duration, was an honourable and virtuous flame. Petrarch aspired to the happiness of being united to Laura in marriage. We have unquestionable grounds for believing, from the evidence of his own wri-

tings, that the heart of Laura was not insensible to his passion ; and, although the term of his probation was tedious and severe, he cherished a hope, approaching to confidence, that he was at last to attain the end of his wishes. Such are the ideas that we are led to entertain, from the writings of the poet himself, of the nature and object of his passion ; and such has been the uniform and continued belief of the world with regard to it, from his own days to the present. At length comes into the field, a hardy but most uncourteous knight, who, with a spirit very opposite to that of the heroes of chivalry, blasts at once the fair fame of the virtuous Laura, and the hitherto unsullied honour of her lover ; and, proudly throwing down his gauntlet of defiance, maintains, that Laura was a married woman, the

mother of a numerous family; that Petrarch, with all his professions of a pure and honourable flame, had no other end in his unexampled assiduity of pursuit, than what every libertine proposes to himself in the possession of a mistress: and that the lovely Laura, though never actually unfaithful to her husband's bed, was sensible to the passion of her *Cicisbeo*, highly gratified by his pursuit, and, while she suffered on his account much restraint and severity from a jealous husband, continued to give him every mark of regard which, without a direct breach of her matrimonial vow, she could bestow upon him. Such is the hypothesis of the author of the *Mémoires pour la Vie de Pétrarque*, on the subject of the loves of Petrarch and Laura; and the establishment of this hypothesis, so injurious to the honour



of both, is, in fact, the main scope of that elaborate work.

The principle of sympathy is a noble part of the constitution of the human mind; and is, perhaps, the basis of all the social affections. In forming our opinions of the characters and conduct of other men, we involuntarily place ourselves in their situation, and we judge of them as we should wish to be judged ourselves in similar circumstances. Hence, in every doubtful case, where the conduct of another is found to admit of opposite constructions, a candid mind will ever give its decision on the side of virtue and of honour. Hence, likewise, the warmest indignation arises in every ingenuous breast, on observing in others, a violation of this rule of candour, in a propensity to form unfavourable opinions of conduct or of

character: We are prompted eagerly to scrutinize the foundations of such illiberal opinions; and we conceive it a duty we owe to virtue and to honour, a task enjoined us by the respect due to our common nature, to refute the calumny, expose the artifices of the aggressor, and restore the injured to his just estimation.

In the examination of this hypothesis, I laid down to myself certain rules, which, as they are of a general nature, may, as I imagine, be applied with propriety to all investigations of a similar kind, where the evidence is of that compound species I have mentioned. These rules are the following:

I. Where a doubtful fact is to be ascertained, by bringing together, comparing and weighing the sense of various passages of an author's writings, the construction put on *ambiguous* expressions ought

to be such as is consonant with the sense of those passages or expressions, which, on the same subject, are *plain* and *unambiguous*.

II. Where a person's *character* and *manner of thinking, feeling, or acting*, are clear, from the general tenor of his life and writings, no interpretation ought to be given to doubtful passages of those writings, which contradicts, or is inconsistent with, such *character, sentiments, and conduct*.

III. Where many passages concur to establish the belief of the disputed fact, a single passage, though apparently contradictory to that supposition, must not be allowed weight, if it is possible to give it an explanation consistent with that opinion which is better supported.

IV. In such a case, where many passa-



ges concur to establish the belief of a certain fact, and there appear one or two passages in apparent contradiction to that belief, there is room to suspect either an *error of transcription or typography*; or, if such supposition is excluded, *interpolation or fabrication*.

V. In the supposition of interpolation or fabrication, there must of necessity be included a cogent and adequate *motive*; and, therefore, where such a motive is utterly wanting, the supposition is not to be indulged.

VI. Where this motive is apparent, the presumption of *falsehood* is in proportion to the strength of the motive, the facility of executing the deception, and the weight of the opposing evidence.

VII. Where a passage is suspected of interpolation or fabrication, it is most

material to attend to the sense of the *context*, or what immediately precedes and follows the passage in dispute; as its *consonancy* or *dissonancy* is strong matter of corroboration.

If these rules of evidence are well-founded, they will afford a just criterion for the decision of all questions of historical controversy, where the evidence is of a compound, circumstantial, and presumptive nature; and where our belief is the consequence, not of authority but of argument. Of such a nature is that hypothesis of the Abbé de Sade, which I shall now proceed to examine.

Previously to the appearance of the work of the Abbé de Sade, those authors who had written the life of Petrarch, had, in treating of Laura, universally acknowledged, that much uncertainty prevailed

with regard to the real name, family, and rank of this celebrated personage. In general, however, we find but two different opinions on this subject. The one is, that her parents were of an honourable family in Provence; and that her father<sup>1</sup> resided at a small country-seat or village in the territory of Avignon, near the sources of the Sorga: the other, that she was sprung

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<sup>1</sup> To this gentleman Velutello has given the name and title of Henri Chiabau, Lord of Cabrieres. It must be owned, however, that this fact is not absolutely authenticated. It is in reality only the probable conjecture of Velutello himself, who was at pains to search the baptismal register of the parish in which Vaucluse is situate; and, finding that a child of the name of Laura was registered as having been born to Henri Chiabau, Lord of Cabrieres, on the 4th of June, 1314, he thence concluded, there being no other registration of that name which could possibly apply to the object of his research, that this, assuredly, was the mistress of Petrarch.



from the house of Sade, a daughter of that family, which is of ancient date, and considerable rank in the city of Avignon. The former of these opinions, which has been adopted by almost all the Italian authors, is founded on a variety of passages in the writings of the poet himself, of which I shall afterwards take particular notice. The latter opinion, which is that which chiefly prevails at Avignon, where the poet passed a considerable part of his life, is founded on the following circumstances.

In the Ambrosian Library at Milan, there is preserved a manuscript copy of Virgil,<sup>1</sup> which is said to have been the pro-

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<sup>1</sup> Now, it is believed, in the national library at Paris, removed amidst the plunder of Italy, by Bonaparte.

perty of Petrarch; and on the margins of which are many notes, alleged to be in the hand-writing of the poet. One of these, which is written on the first page of the MS. is in the following words :

“ Laura, propriis virtutibus illustris, et

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“ TRANSLATED.

“ Laura, illustrious by the virtues she possessed, and celebrated during many years by my verses, appeared to my eyes, for the first time, on the 6th day of April, in the year 1327, at Avignon, in the church of St Clair, at 6 o'clock in the morning. I was then in my early youth. In the same town, on the same day, and at the same hour, in the year 1348, this light, this sun withdrew from the world. I was then at Verona, ignorant of the calamity that had befallen me. A letter I received from my Ludovico, on the 19th of the following month, brought me the cruel information. Her body, so beautiful, so pure, was deposited, on the day of her death, after vespers, in the church of the Cordeliers. Her soul, as Seneca has said of Africanus, I am confident, returned to heaven,

“ meis longùm celebrata carminibus, pri-  
“ mùm oculis meis apparuit, sub primum  
“ adolescentiæ meæ tempus, anno Domini  
“ 1327, die 6. mensis Aprilis, in Ecclesiâ  
“ Sanctæ Claræ Avinioni, horâ matutinâ ;  
“ et in eâdem civitate, oedem mense Apri-  
“ lis, eodem die sexto, eâdem horâ primâ,

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from whence it came. For the purpose of often dwelling on the sad remembrance of so severe a loss, I have written these particulars in a book that comes frequently under my inspection. I have thus prepared for myself a pleasure mingled with pain. My loss, ever present to my memory, will teach me, that there is no longer any thing in this life which can afford me delight : That it is now time that I should renounce Babylon, since the chain which bound me to it with so tender an attachment, is broken. Nor will this, with the assistance of Almighty God, be difficult. My mind, turning to the past, will set before me all the superfluous cares that have engaged me ; all the deceitful hopes that I have entertained ; and the unexpected and afflicting consequences of all my projects.”



“ anno autem 1348, ab hac luce lux illa  
“ subtracta est; cum ego fortè tunc Vero-  
“ næ essem, heu fati mei nescius! rumor  
“ autem infelix per literas Ludovici mei,  
“ me Parmæ reperit, anno eodem, mense  
“ Maio, die 19 manè. Corpus illud cas-  
“ tissimum atque pulcherrimum, in loco  
“ *Fratrum Minorum* repositum est, ipso  
“ die mortis, ad vesperam. Animam qui-  
“ dem ejus, ut de Africano ait Seneca, in  
“ cœlum unde erat rediisse mihi persua-  
“ deo. Hoc autem ad acerbam rei me-  
“ moriam, amarâ quâdam dulcedine scri-  
“ bere visum est, hoc potissimùm loco qui  
“ sæpe sub oculis meis redit; ut cogitem  
“ nihil esse debere quod ampliùs mihi pla-  
“ ceat in hac vitâ, et effracto majori la-  
“ queo, tempus esse de Babylone fugien-  
“ di, crebrâ horum inspectione, ac fugacis-  
“ simæ ætatis æstimatione commoneat.

“ Quod præviâ Dei gratiâ facile erit, præ-  
“ teriti temporis curas supervacuas, spes  
“ inanes, et inexpectatos exitus acriter et  
“ viriliter cogitanti.”

The evidence of this note, supposing it authentic, positively fixes the burial-place of Petrarch's Laura to have been in the church of the *Fratres Minores*, or Cordeliers, at Avignon. At the distance of near two hundred years from the death of Laura, (anno 1533,) a Florentine gentleman, of the name of Manelli, being at that time at Avignon, amused himself in making researches into every particular relative to the history of Petrarch and of Laura; and, with the aid of two others, Maurice de Seves,<sup>1</sup> and a M.

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<sup>1</sup> Probably Maurice Sceve, a French poet, contemporary with Clement Marot, of whose composition there are some pieces in the 4to edition of the works

Bontemps, who were instigated by a like curiosity, examined every quarter of this church of the Cordeliers, in the hope of tracing some memorial of Laura, whom, on the evidence of the manuscript note on *Virgil*, they believed to have been there interred. In one of the chapels of that church, called *Capella della Croce*, in which was the burial-place of the family of Sade, they found a large flat stone, which bore no inscription whatever. This, if it afforded no indication of being the grave of Laura, at least gave no proof to the contrary; they therefore opened the grave, in quest of further evidence. At first they perceived nothing but earth, intermixed with small bones, among which

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of Marot, published at the Hague, 1731, by the Abbé Langlet du Fresnoy, (under the fictitious name of the Chevalier Gordon de Percel.)



was an entire jaw-bone. Examining, however, more minutely, they discovered a little casket of lead, fastened with a brass wire, on opening which, they found a piece of parchment, folded, and sealed with green wax, together with a medal of bronze, on the one side of which was the figure of a very little woman, (*figura d'una donna picciolissima*), in the attitude of uncovering her bosom with both her hands; and around, in the way of legend, were only these four letters, M. L. M. I.

In endeavouring to explain this inscription, it occurred to Maurice de Seves, that the four letters might probably be thus interpreted, *Madonna Laura morta jace*. This was plainly nothing more than conjecture; and, had the tomb contained no other evidence of a more decisive nature, all hitherto discovered had been of little

consequence to ascertain the object of inquiry. The sealed parchment was, therefore, next examined; and, although it is owned that the writing was at first quite illegible, the characters being so defaced, (as well they might, after lying two hundred years amidst the dissolved materials of a human body), yet Maurice de Seves, by examining it, when exposed to the strong rays of the sun, is said to have at last made out distinctly the following sonnet, of which he took a fair transcript: <sup>1</sup>

*Qui riposan quei caste e felici ossa  
Di quella alma gentile e sola in terra.*

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<sup>1</sup> The sonnet is here given exactly, as to orthography and punctuation, from the copy which the Abbé de Sade says he took from the original.

Thus almost literally translated :

Here now repose those chaste, those blest remains  
Of that most gentle spirit, sole in earth!  
Harsh monumental stone, that here confin'st

*Aspro't dur sasso hor ben teco hai soterra  
El vero honor la fama e belta scossa.  
Morte ha del verde Lauro svelta e mossa  
Fresca radice, e il premio de mia guerra  
Di quattro lustri; e piu se anchor non erra  
Mio penser tristo; e il chiude in pocha fossa.  
Felice pianta: in borgo de Avignone  
Nacque e mori: e qui con ella jace  
La penna, el stil, l'inchiestro e la ragione.  
O delicate membrà, O viva face  
Che anchor me cuoci e struggi, inginocchione  
Ciascun preghi il Signor te accepti in pace.*

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True honour, fame, and beauty, all o'erthrown!  
Death has destroy'd that Laurel green, and torn  
Its tender roots; and all the noble meed  
Of my long warfare, passing (if aright  
My melancholy reckoning holds) four lustres.  
O happy plant! Avignon's favour'd soil  
Has seen thee spring and die;—and here with thee  
Thy poet's pen, and muse, and genius lies.  
O lovely, beauteous limbs! O vivid fire,  
That even in death hast power to melt the soul!  
Heaven be thy portion, peace with God on high!



This sonnet is apparently written in the person of Petrarch; but being, in the judgment of Bembo, Beccatelli, Muratori, and the best of the Italian critics, very inferior, in point of merit, to the other compositions of the poet, they have supposed it the work of another, who had here assumed his character, in composing an epitaph in honour of Laura. It is remarked, from the evidence of the note on Virgil, that Petrarch was at Parma, at the time when Laura was interred at Avignon; that the intelligence of her death did not reach him for several weeks: and therefore, that this inscription, though written under his character, could not possibly be of his composition. If, however, such an inscription was actually found in 1533, in the tomb of the church of the Cordeliers, whoever was its author, it would

seem clearly to indicate, that this was in reality the grave of Petrarch's Laura ; and the place of her interment, being a chapel erected by the house of Sade, as a burial-place for all of their family, a strong confirmation thence arises, of the tradition current at Avignon, that Laura was of that house ; and a reasonable foundation seems to be laid for the hypothesis of the author of the *Mémoires*, that she was the same person with Laura de Noves, who was married to Hugh de Sade, and from whom the whole of the branches of that family now existing are lineally descended.

There are, however, many circumstances that tend to bring into doubt, or rather that seem entirely to confute, this fundamental fact, that Laura either died or was buried at Avignon.

If we admit the evidence of the note on Virgil, and of the sonnet found in the *Capella della Croce*, Laura was *born* at Avignon, and *died* in the same place. The works of the poet, indeed, contain the most positive information that Laura *died* in the same place where she was *born*, and where she had passed the greatest part of her life: but they likewise furnish evidence that this place was not Avignon, but some small village or country-seat in the territory of Avignon, near to the source of the *Sorga*, or the fountain of *Vaucluse*.<sup>1</sup> Of this the proofs seem quite conclusive.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the decided opinion of M. de la Bastie, after the most careful perusal of the works of Petrarch: "Si l'on consulte Pétrarque lui même, dont " assurément le temoignage est ici préférable à tout



In the *Trionfo della Morte*, Part 2. the poet feigns that Laura, on the night after her death, appeared to him in a vision: and, in the course of a long conversation, in which she acknowledges, that she had ever felt for him a mutual passion, and endeavours to satisfy him, that every singularity of her conduct, however harshly he might at the time have judged it, was prompted by the sincerity of her affection for him; she says in one passage,

In tutte l'altre cose assai beata,  
In una sola a me stessa dispiacqui;

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“ autre, nous serons forcés d'avouer que Laure mourut dans le même village où elle étoit née, où elle avoit passé sa vie avec sa famille, et où Pétrarque avoit accoutumé d'aller la voir, pendant son séjour à Vaucluse.”---Mem. Acad. Inscr. T. 17. p. 417.

Che'n troppo *umil terren* mi trovai nata :

Duolmi ancor veramente ch'io non nacqui

Almen più presso al tuo fiorito nido ;

Ma assai fu bel paese ov' io ti piacqui.

In all things else I deem'd me fortunate,

Save that a soil too mean had giv'n me birth.

Of this at least with reason I complain'd,

That distant far from those fair fields I sprang,

Which gave thee being. Yet that soil was fair,

Nor meanly deem'd of me, where first we met,

And I had power to win thy heart to love.

It was impossible that Laura could have termed the city of Avignon *umil terreno*, or that she could have been ashamed of it as the place of her birth. At that time, Avignon was the Papal residence, and one of the most splendid cities in the south of Europe ; a city, indeed, where luxury and corruption of manners had attained to such a height, that Petrarch

himself characterises it by the epithet of the *Gallic Babylon*.<sup>1</sup>

In the fourth sonnet of the 1st Part of his *Sonetti e Canzoni*, the poet has the following remarkable allusions, which may perhaps be thought to border a little on impiety. Divine Providence, he observes, has thought fit to display its wonders, by choosing its most illustrious instruments, either from a servile condition, or from a low and obscure place of origin. Of this he gives for examples, the mean occupations of the Apostles, the obscurity of the birth-place of our Saviour, who, disdain-  
ing imperial Rome, chose an inconsiderable town of Judea for the place of his nativity; and, lastly, the humble origin of the matchless Laura, that resplendent sun of

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<sup>1</sup> Epist. lib. sine tit. Ep. 16.



beauty, who rose upon the world from a small obscure village :

Ed or di picciol borgo un sol n' ha dato,  
Tal, che natura e 'l luogo sì ringrazio,  
Onde sì bella donna al mondo nacque.

Son. 4. Part. 1.

The situation of this *picciol borgo*, or small village, is likewise distinctly pointed out. It was in the neighbourhood of the hills that rise above the fountain of *Vaucluse*, the spring of the *Sorga*. The poet sends a present to a friend, of two birds which he had caught, and he accompanies the gift with a sonnet, in which the birds are supposed thus to address the person to whom they are sent :

A piè de' colli, ove la bella vesta  
Prese delle terrene membra pria  
La donna, che colui ch' a te ne 'nvia,  
Spesso dal sonno lagrimando desta;  
Libere in pace passavam, &c.

Son. 8. Part 1.

“ At the foot of those hills where that  
“ fair nymph was born, who oft causes  
“ him who sends this present to pass the  
“ sleepless night in tears, we once enjoyed  
“ the sweets of liberty,” &c.

In the 155th sonnet of the 1st part,  
(*Almo Sol.*) the poet, addressing himself  
to the sun, complains, that when his light  
is withdrawn, and the night comes on, he  
is deprived of what he most delights in,  
“ the shadow that falls from yonder low  
hill, where sparkles that sweet fire ; where  
from a slender twig the beauteous laurel  
grew ;” and he laments, that the darkness  
hides from his eyes “ that blessed spot,  
where, with its mistress, his heart for ever  
dwells.”

O sole,—

—Fuggendo mi toi quel ch' i' più bramo

L' ombra che cade da quell' umil colle,

Ove sfavilla il mio soave fuoco,  
 Ove 'l gran lauro fu picciol verga;  
 Crescendo, mentr' io parlo; a gli occhi tolle  
 La dolce vista del beato loco,  
 Ove 'l mio cor con la sua donna alberga.

So, in the 40th sonnet of the 2d part,  
 the poet says,

Quella per cui con Sorga ho cangiat' Arno.—

a passage clearly marking, that his preference for the Sorga arose from Laura's residing on its banks.

The 17th Canzone, part 1., (*Di pensier in pensier*), furnishes a similar inference:

—————Oltra quell' alpe,  
 Là, dove 'l ciel è più sereno e lieto,  
 Mi rivedrai sovr' un ruscel corrente,  
 Ove l' aura si sente  
 D' un fresco ed odorifero laureto:  
 Ivi è 'l mio cor, e quella che 'l m' invola.

“ Beyond those hills where the air is  
 “ mild and serene; beside the rushing



“brook, where the gale wafts from yon  
“fresh laurel’s leaves, its rich perfume;  
“’tis there she dwells who reft me of my  
“heart.” On this passage Gesualdo re-  
marks, in a note, “Era presso all fiume,  
“ov’ albergava Madonna Laura, che si  
“dolce spirava.” “It was near the ri-  
“ver where lay the residence of Laura,  
“that laurel whose fragrance was to him  
“so delightful.”

In the 52d sonnet of the 2d part, the  
poet thus describes his feelings on return-  
ing to Vacluse, after the death of Laura:

Sento l’ aura mia antica; e i dolci colli  
Veggio apparir onde ’l bel lume nacque  
Che tenne gli occhi miei mentr’al ciel piacque  
Bramosi e lieti; or li tien tristi e molli,---  
Vedove l’erbe, e torbide son l’acque;  
E voto e freddo ’l nido in ch’ ella giacque.---

“Once more I breathe that dear accus-

“tomed air: Once more I view those  
“beautiful hills, whence that resplendent  
“light arose, which once gave joy to  
“these eyes, while heaven so pleased to  
“bless me with her sight; but now,  
“alas! has steeped them for ever in tears.  
“——Widowed are those green fields,—  
“and turbid is that stream,—and void  
“and cold the nest in which she lay.”<sup>1</sup>

Additional evidence to the same purpose may be drawn from some of the Latin poems of Petrarch. In the 7th epistle of the first book of the Latin verse epistles, [*Quid faciam*,] addressed to James Colonna, Bishop of Lombes, the poet, after enlarging on his unhappy passion, and mentioning that he sought the soli-

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<sup>1</sup> See at the end, a translation of this sonnet, “*Once more I breathe, &c.*”

tude of Vaicluse as a retreat where he might abstract his mind from all its former cares, and apply himself wholly to study and contemplation, adds, that he finds, to his sorrow, that Laura's image was only the more present to his thoughts ; that she followed him into her *own*, or native fields, and haunted him both in his waking hours, and in his dreams by night :

Hoc procul aspexi secreto in littore saxum,  
Naufragiis tutumque meis aptumque putavi ;  
Huc modò vela dedi, nunc montibus abditus istis,  
Flens mecum enumero transacti temporis annos ;  
Insequitur tamen illa iterum, *et sua rura retentans*,  
Nunc vigilantis adest oculis, nunc fronte minaci  
Instabilem vano ludit terrore soporem.

I should be glad to know what interpretation the Abbé de Sade would put upon these words, *sua rura retentans*, unless this, that his tormentress, *returning to her native*



*fields*, presented herself to his imagination, both by day and night. The Abbé gives a translation of this very passage of the 7th epistle, but he studiously omits the *sua rura retentans*.

Nothing can be more decisive than the above passages, which clearly intimate that Laura was born in a small village, or country residence, in the neighbourhood of the source of the Sorga.

Many passages of the poet's writings contain likewise clear intimation that Laura *died* in the same place where she was *born*, and where she had passed the greatest part of her life.

Thus, in the 53d sonnet of the 2d part:

E questo 'l nido in che la mia Fenice  
Mise l' aurate e le purpuree penne;  
Che sotto le sue ali il mio cor tenne.---  
E me lasciato hai quì misero e solo,

Tal, che pien di duol sempre al loco torno  
Che per te consecrato onoro e colo.

Veggendo a' colli oscura notte intorno  
Onde prendesti al ciel l'ultimo volo,---

“ Here is the nest in which my Phœnix  
“ lay, and couched her golden and em-  
“ purpled wings.—Here thou hast left me  
“ miserable and alone. Thus, for ever  
“ a prey to grief, I turn me to that dear  
“ spot of earth which thou hast consecra-  
“ ted, and which, on that account, I vene-  
“ rate and honour : I view those hills, now  
“ dark and desolate, from whence thou  
“ took'st thy flight to heaven.”

So, likewise, in that beautiful sonnet on his return to Vacluse, *Valle, che de' lamenti miei se' piena*, &c.<sup>1</sup> he gives the most explicit intimation, that the grave of Laura

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<sup>1</sup> See a translation of it, at the end, “ *Thou lonely vale, &c.*”

was in that very place, and amidst the same scenes where he so often had enjoyed the happiness of her society :

Valle, che de' lamenti miei se' piena ;  
 Fiume che spesso del mio pianger cresci ;  
 Dolce sentier, che sì amaro riesci ;  
 Colle, che mi piacesti, or mi rincresci,  
 Ben riconosco in voi l' usate forme,  
 Non, lasso ! in me—

Quinci vedea 'l mio bene ; e per quest 'orme  
 Torno a veder, ond' al ciel nuda è gita  
 Lasciando in terra la sua bella spoglia.

Son. 32. Part. 2.

“Thou vale, which so oft has echoed my  
 “lamentations ! River, which my tears so  
 “oft have swelled !—Sweet paths, sweet  
 “hills, to me no longer sources of delight !  
 “—Well do I recognise your accustomed  
 “forms : Yes, ye are still the same :—’Tis I  
 “alone am changed.—For here, where for-  
 “merly I wont to meet all that was dear to



“ me on earth, I seek in vain her footsteps  
 “ —From this same spot she wing’d her  
 “ way to heaven ; leaving her earthly  
 “ spoils alone behind.”<sup>1</sup>

In one of his Latin eclogues, in which the poet celebrates Laura under the fictitious name of Galatea, three nymphs, Niobe, Fusca, and Fulgida, are introduced in conversation, and one of them asks the others to point out to her the place where Galatea was buried ; which Fulgida does in these words :

Carpe iter, qua nodosis impexa capistris  
 Colla boum, crebrasque canum sub limine parvo  
 Videris excubias, gilvosque ad claustra molossos :  
 Hic locus tua damna tegit ; jamque aspice contrà,  
 Hic Galatea sita est.——

“ Take your way yonder, where you will

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<sup>1</sup> See at the end, a translation of this sonnet,  
 “ *Thou lonely vale, &c.*”

“ see the oxen yoked by the neck, and  
“ the watch-dogs guarding the entry of  
“ a small house: that hides from your  
“ sight what you are in search of; for  
“ on the other side of it is the burial-place  
“ of Galatea,” &c.

It is evident that the passages above quoted from the writings of the poet himself, ascertaining both the place of Laura's birth and of her burial to have been in the country, in some small village or villa, in the neighbourhood of the hills, and of the source of the Sorga, stand in direct contradiction to the manuscript note on *Virgil*,<sup>1</sup> and to the sonnet said

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<sup>1</sup> The note on *Virgil*, when contrasted with many passages of the poet's writings, exhibits likewise other intrinsic evidences of forgery. This note bears positive testimony, that Petrarch saw Laura for the first time at matin-prayers in the church of St Claire

to have been found in the grave of the church of the Cordeliers. The question,

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at Avignon. But, from many passages of the poet's writings, it appears, that his first interview with Laura was in a solitary walk in the fields. Thus, in the 8th Ballatta, part 1. (*Nova angeletta*) :

Nova angeletta sovra l' ale accorta  
 Scese dal cielo in su la fresca riva,  
 Là 'nd io passava sol per mio destino :  
 Poi che senza compagna e senza scorta  
 Mi vide ; un laccio che di seta ordiva  
 Tese fra l' erba, ond' è verde 'l cammino :  
 Allor fui preso. —

So, likewise, sonnet 157. part 1. :

Una candida cerva sopra l' erba  
 Verde, m' apparve con duo corna d'oro,  
 Fra due riviere a l'ombra d'un alloro.

And yet more clearly, in the 3d of his Latin eclogues :

Daphne, ego te solam deserto in littore primùm  
 Aspexi ; dubius hominemne Deamne viderem.

The evidence arising from these passages, that Petrarch's first interview with his mistress was not in a church, but in the fields, is thus controverted by the



then, is, To which of the opposing proofs are we to give our faith? To this question we shall certainly not long hesitate for an answer, when we consider, that the

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Abbé de Sade. " Je suis persuadé que ces allégories qui présentent des images riantes de la campagne doivent être entendues des dehors d'Avignon, ou des charmes du printemps, qui est la saison dans laquelle Pétrarque vit Laure pour la première fois. Convenoit-il qu'il parlât de l'église de Ste Claire en rappelant la première époque de son amour? Un poète qui parle de ces choses-là, est bien-aise d'égayer la scene; il n'ira pas la placer dans une église: et sur une chose si peu importante en elle-même, il ne doit pas s'assujettir à la vérité historique: il se permet toutes les fictions qui peuvent rendre ses vers agréables." (Notes, vol. i. p. 57.) If this mode of reasoning is to be admitted, it is equally effectual against those passages which the Abbé has brought in support of his own hypothesis, as those which militate against it; and tends, indeed, to invalidate the whole evidence brought from the poems of Petrarch in proof of any part of his history.

one class of proofs admits of no suspicion of fabrication or imposture; while the other is extremely suspicious, and may be altogether a forgery. It is impossible to suppose, that numberless passages, interspersed through the works of Petrarch, indicating the place of Laura's birth and death, all naturally connected with the subject treated of, though some furnishing their evidence not in positive terms, but only by inference, should every one of them be fabricated; and that the forger should have been able to insert all these fabricated passages in every one of the manuscripts of the author's works which are to be found in Europe. Nor even, should we allow this strange undertaking to have been practicable, is it possible to figure a motive capable of inducing to the attempt. For, what interest

had any man to show, that the Laura of Petrarch was born and died in an obscure residence in the country, while nothing more was proved to ascertain her origin or connections? But this reasoning will not apply to those proofs which are brought to show that Laura was born and died at Avignon. The manuscript note on *Virgil*, and the sonnet said to have been found in the grave, stand evidently in a very different predicament. Here the forgery was easy; the motive to it strong and alluring. At the distance of two hundred years from the death of Petrarch, it was no difficult matter for the possessor of this manuscript of *Virgil*, which is said to exhibit a great number of notes on its margin, in the genuine hand-writing of the poet, to have fabricated one additional note in imitation of that hand-writing, of which he had be-



fore him so many specimens; nor did it require a great measure of ingenuity to compose a single sonnet, written in the person of Petrarch, and that too perhaps of equal merit with many of his genuine compositions. Of both forgeries the motive was probably the same, which instigated the Abbé de Sade to the compilation of his elaborate work, the desire of vindicating to this house the relation to so celebrated a personage as the Laura of Petrarch: though, as we shall presently see, the Abbé's hypothesis goes beyond the pretensions of his ancestors, and much further than the evidence of this note and sonnet can conduct him; even supposing both were of the most certain authenticity.

We have already remarked, that the purpose of the search into the graves in the church of the Cordeliers, was to ascer-

tain the truth of that report, which gave the Laura of Petrarch to the house of Sade. Two or three persons, zealous in this research, unite their endeavours for that purpose, and their investigation is naturally directed to the family burial-place, which is a chapel of that church called *Capella della Croce*. Among other monuments in this chapel, a flat gravestone is discovered, which bears no inscription; and, on opening the grave, some bones are found, and a casket, containing a medal and a parchment. The medal has on it, the figure of a very little woman. Here, say our antiquaries, is, in all probability, the figure of Laura.\*

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\* I do not recollect any passage of the writings of Petrarch, which marks that Laura was of small stature: nor is it easy to conceive how the medal,

Around the figure are four letters, M. L. M. I. This, says one of them, (Maurice de Seves) is undoubtedly to be interpreted *Madonna Laura morta jace*; though it is confessed that monumental inscriptions and the legends of medals are rarely found in the vernacular tongue; and though M. L. M. I. might have been read twenty different ways, with as much plausibility as in the way that Maurice chooses to read it. The point, then, being already settled that this must be the grave of Laura, the parchment, to be sure, must contribute its relative evidence to the same effect. This parchment, however, is found at first to be utterly illegible: a fact not at all surprising. The wonder

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representing only a single figure, could accurately determine the size or stature of the person represented.



is, that the parchment itself should have been discoverable : for, parchment being an animal substance, must, one should naturally suppose, have gone into total dissolution, in much less time than two hundred years, when inclosed in the same coffin with a putrefying carcase, from the juices of which, a leaden box, shut only with a brass wire, would be a very insufficient protection. But the parchment (thus unaccountably preserved) is said to have been actually found. It could not, however, be read without the aid of the strongest light. It therefore was not read in the little dark chapel of the church.\* Maurice de Seves, in all proba-

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\* "Sacellum, in quo illud (sepulchrum) videtur, obscurum est. Sinistra ingressus habet altare muro adstructum, ante quod, sub grandi saxo, sine omni ornatu et inscriptione, Laura cubat." Phil. Tomasini, Petr. *Rediviv.* p. 111.

bility, puts it in his pocket, and takes it home for his deliberate examination. He had already given his opinion on the legend of the medal, which ascertained Laura's relation to the grave. His credit, therefore, as an antiquary, is at stake to support this opinion, by the further evidence of the rotten parchment; and next day he produces a fairly written sonnet, which he declares to have copied from the original, of which, with much pains, he had at length been able to decypher the characters. The original is never afterwards heard of. A sonnet, indeed, written on parchment, is preserved at this day among the archives of the family of Sade, which they pretend to be the original, found in the grave, and regard accordingly as a most precious document. But, though mutilated a little, to give it the air

of antiquity, as its characters are extremely distinct, and may be easily read, that circumstance of itself demonstrates, that it cannot be the parchment which, even two hundred years ago, was not without the utmost difficulty decyphered by Maurice de Seves, with the aid of a very strong light.

The sonnet or epitaph itself is generally esteemed a poor composition; and the Italian authors are indignant that it should ever have been suspected to come from the hand of Petrarch: but Petrarch's compositions are not all of transcendent merit; and its intrinsic character is not, perhaps, of itself, sufficient to bring its authenticity into doubt. The medal and the lead box are said to have been seen about the middle of the last (18th) century, in the possession of the



monks of the Convent of St Claire; but there they are no longer; and the Abbé de Sade mentions a shrewd conjecture of the Superior of the Convent, "that they had been sold to some *Seigneur Anglois*." Monks are very dexterous in the fabrication of all sorts of relics; and it was no bad policy of the *Fratres Minores*, to attract the notice of strangers to their convent, by the exhibition of a medal and a lead box, the evidences of a curious and disputed point of history: nor is it at all improbable, that afterwards a knavish friar, more studious of his own interest than that of his convent, might have purloined those precious relics, and got his own price for them. The truth of all these latter circumstances may be admitted in perfect consistence with the supposition that the sonnet itself was a forgery.

One circumstance seems to have altogether escaped the Abbé de Sade; namely, that the two main pieces of evidence on which he founds, viz. the manuscript note on Virgil, and the sonnet and medal found in the grave at Avignon, are quite inconsistent, and so far from mutually supporting, are actually destructive of each other's evidence. If the note on Virgil is authentic, the medal and sonnet are forgeries; and *vice versa*, if the latter are authentic, the note on Virgil is a forgery. We learn from the note, that Laura died at Avignon, on the *sixth of April*, and that she was buried there on *the same day*; *ipso die mortis ad vesperam* (a precaution perhaps necessary from the nature of her disease.) Now if this fact is true, that Laura was buried within a few hours of her death, it may indeed be *possible*,

though certainly not very *probable*, that a sonnet should have been composed to her memory, fairly engrossed on parchment, closed in a lead casket, and deposited in the coffin with her body: But that a medal of bronze, with a sculptured image and inscription, should have been moulded and cast in the space of a few hours to be inclosed in the same casket and coffin, is a fact that we may fairly pronounce to exceed all belief. If, on the other hand, this medal and parchment were actually found in the grave, and this grave was in reality the grave of Laura, we must utterly renounce the belief that she was buried on the same day on which she died; and in that case we must abandon the note on Virgil as a forgery. That the learned Abbé should have been blind to this unlucky alternative, when he founded



on the evidence of *both the note and the medal*, is a strong proof of that inordinate zeal in the support of a favourite theory, which is capable of obscuring, even the acutest judgment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Horace Walpole (Lord Orford) a critic whose opinion on subjects of this nature, is entitled to considerable weight, thus writes to his friend Dr Joseph Warton, March 16, 1765: "M. de Sade  
" seems as much enchanted with Petrarch as the age  
" was in which he lived; whilst their ignorance of  
" good authors excuses their bigotry to the restorer  
" of taste. You will not, I believe, be so thoroughly  
" convinced as the biographer seems to be, of the au-  
" thentic discovery of Laura's body, and the sonnet  
" placed on her bosom. When a lady dies of the  
" plague, in the height of its ravages, it is not proba-  
" ble that her family thought of interring poetry  
" with her, or, indeed, of any thing but burying her  
" body as quickly as they could: nor is it more like-  
" ly that a pestilential vault was opened afterwards  
" for that purpose. I have no doubt but that the  
" sonnet was prepared and slipt into the tomb, when  
" they were determined to find her corpse."

Such is the history of those celebrated documents, which are said to prove the place of Laura's birth and death to have been Avignon, and to ascertain that her grave was in the chapel of the church of the Cordeliers in that city, and in the burial place of the family of Sade. I have stated fairly the whole of this evidence, which rests entirely on the manuscript note on *Virgil* and this miserable sonnet; and I leave that evidence, contradictory as I have shown it to be, the one branch of it at variance with the other, and the one or the other therefore indisputably false, to be balanced by those numberless passages of the poet's undoubted and authentic writings, which most unequivocally assert, that Laura was neither *born*, nor *died*, nor was *buried*, at Avignon; but that she was born in a small village or country re-

sidence in the neighbourhood of Vacluse, where she passed her life in tranquil and humble retirement;<sup>1</sup> that she died there, and was buried in the same place. If the proofs on both sides are impartially weighed, I am much deceived, indeed, if any person, competent to judge of this species

<sup>1</sup> In nobil sangue vita humile e queta,

Son. 180, part 1.

Non la conohbe il mondo mentre l' hebbe :  
Conobbil' io ch' u pianger quì rimasi.

Son. 67. part 2.

With what propriety, or consistence with truth, could the poet have thus expressed himself of Laura de Noves, the wife of a person of high rank, and who had passed the whole of her life in all the gaiety and splendour of the court of Avignon? Still less would the pious Petrarch have borrowed a scripture expression, addressed to the Saviour of the world, (St John's Gospel, chap. xvii. v. 25.) and applied it, falsely too, to the object of an adulterous passion.



of evidence, will hesitate to decide that the latter is infinitely preponderating.

The arguments by which the Abbé de Sade has endeavoured to invalidate the positive evidence contained in the writings of Petrarch, that Laura was born, lived and died in an obscure retreat in the country, are not undeserving of attention; as they are strong examples of that laboured sophistry, which is usually employed when one endeavours to support a weak or false hypothesis.

Avignon, says the Abbé, though a city of some celebrity, was far inferior in splendour to many of the Italian cities; and the mind of Petrarch, being filled with the idea of their magnificence, might not unnaturally have termed the former *picciol borgo*. Unfortunately, Petrarch at this time knew no-

thing of the splendid cities of Italy, but by description. He was born at *Arezzo*, an inconsiderable town in the Florentine territory; and he was no more than seven years of age, when he, together with his whole family, removed to Avignon. This city, therefore, was at any rate the most splendid he had ever seen; unless, perhaps, he had had a transient glimpse of Florence on his journey. It could, indeed, be only a distant prospect; for his father was then in a state of banishment from that capital, and durst not enter it. We may judge, then, with what propriety Petrarch could have given the epithet of *picciol borgo* to Avignon, then the seat of the papal residence, the perpetual resort of the most splendid embassies from all the sovereigns of Europe; and rendered illustrious, as the Abbé de Sade himself informs us, by fre-

quent visits of the most celebrated princes, many of whom had actually built palaces there;<sup>1</sup> a city, too, where, as the same author acknowledges, the vast concourse of strangers had necessarily introduced every species of voluptuousness and debauchery.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Les Princes, non contents d'envoyer des Ambassadeurs au Pape dans les moindres occasions, ne dédaignoient pas d'aller souvent en personne à Avignon, traiter avec lui des grands intérêts de leurs états. Le Roi de Majorque et le Dauphin de Viennois y avoient même des demeures fixes.—Le palais du Roi de Naples étoit où l'on voit à-présent le monastère de St Ursule, qu'on appelle *les Royales*, parcequ'elles habitent le palais d'un Roi. Un grand concours d'étrangers dans une ville, y entraîne nécessairement la licence et la débauche," &c. *Mem. de Pet.* tom. 1. p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Of the very great populousness of this city at that time, we may form a general idea from a remarkable and melancholy proof. The pestilence



But supposing for a moment that Avignon, thus populous, splendid, and luxurious, really seemed a *picciol borgo* in the eyes of Petrarch, whose mind, as the Abbé says, was filled with the great idea of the cities of Italy, (what we have shown to be indeed only an *idea*, as he had never seen them), we cannot allow the same false estimate in the mind of Laura, with respect to the most considerable city which, assuredly, *she* had ever seen. If she had been born at Avignon, it certainly must have merited, in her eyes, a very different estimation from that of an *umil*

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which ravaged Italy and the south of France, in the year 1348, and of which Boccaccio has given, in the introduction to his *Decamerone*, a most eloquent and impressive description, cut off, in the space of three months, a hundred and twenty thousand of the inhabitants of Avignon. It is possible, however, that this might be meant of the territory of Avignon. *Hist. Pistol. Mem. de Petr.* tom. ii. p. 456.

*terreno*, which she was ashamed to avow as the place of her nativity. Yet such, we have seen, the poet describes to have been her estimation of the place of her birth; the only circumstance, she says, respecting her origin, of which she had reason to be ashamed.<sup>1</sup>

But the *picciol borgo* and the *umil terreno*, says the Abbé, was not properly the city of Avignon itself; it was only a suburb, a *fauxbourg* of that city, and thus might well have merited those epithets. To this we shall answer by a single question, which has been well put by M. de la Bastie to those who contend for Laura's being born at Avignon: "Que dirions-nous d'un poète, qui adressant la parole

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<sup>1</sup> See Trionfo della Morte, par. 2. "*In tutte l'altre cose, &c.*"

“à quelqu’un qui seroit né dans le faux-  
 “bourg St Germain, croiroit devoir le  
 “plaindre de ce qu’il n’est pas venu au  
 “monde dans une ville considérable?  
 “Ceux qui naissent dans ce fauxbourg,  
 “sont-ils moins nés à Paris?”

But, continues the Abbé, we find in a  
 fragment which is printed at the end of  
 all the editions of the works of Petrarch,  
 the following expressions :

Dove Sorga e Durenza in maggior vaso

Congiungon le lor chiare e torbide acque ;---

Ivi, ond’ e gli occhi miei el bel lume nacque.---

“That beautiful luminary first arose on  
 “my sight, where the *Sorga* and the *Du-*  
 “*rance* unite their clear and turbid streams  
 “in a larger channel.” Can any thing,  
 says he, mark more precisely the situation  
 of Avignon?

The answer is, *first*, The authenticity of



this fragment is not admitted. It is not found in the best manuscripts of the works of Petrarch; nor have Velutello, Gesualdo, or Bembo, given it a place in their editions of his poems. In the splendid edition printed at Venice, in 1756, it is not admitted into the text, among the genuine poems of Petrarch, but is inserted in an appendix, which the editor entitles, “Giunta d’alcune compositione del Petrarca che si dicono da lui rifiutate.” It is therefore a document of no authority whatever. But, *secondly*, Even supposing it genuine, the description there given does by no means mark precisely the situation of Avignon. The *Sorga* and the *Durance* do not join their streams at Avignon. The *Sorga* falls into the Rhône five miles above Avignon, and the *Durance* six miles be-

low that city. These rivers, therefore, though they unite their streams by both falling into the Rhône, do not mark out Avignon as the point of junction, but rather serve to describe a district termed the *Venaissin*, which comprehends the country for several miles adjacent to Avignon; and, therefore, the description is equally indicative of *Vauchuse* and of *Cabrières*, as it is of Avignon.

But this passage, supposing it genuine, will find its best explanation by a similar one, which occurs in the 10th of the poet's Latin eclogues, entitled *Laurea occidens*; in which he bewails the death of his mistress under his favourite allusion of a *Laurel*:

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Fuit alta remotis,  
Silva locis, qua se diversis montibus acti

Sorga nitens Rhodano, pallensque Ruentia miscent.  
Hic mihi, quo fueram Tusco translatus ab Arno,  
Sic hominum res fata rotant, fuit aridulum rus,  
Dum colui indignè, atque operi successit egestas.—  
Verum inter scopulos nodosaque robora quercûs,  
Creverat ad ripam fluvii pulcherrima Laurus:  
Huc ravior.—————  
Has ego delicias et opes, hæc regna putavi.—

“ In a *remote quarter* of that country, where  
“ the Sorga and Durance unite their  
“ streams, was a thick forest, where, after  
“ I was removed from the Tuscan vale of  
“ *Arno*, I possessed a little barren country-  
“ seat.—Here, amidst the rocks and  
“ thickets of oak, near the borders of the  
“ stream grew a most beautiful Laurel.  
“ This favourite object engrossed all my  
“ care. In this spot was my kingdom,  
“ and here I found my supreme delight.”



In this passage we have the most direct and positive intimation, that the figurative *laurel*, the well-known type of his beautiful mistress, sprang amidst the rocks and thickets in the vicinity of the Sorga and Durance ; where lay that wild and *barren country-seat*, which, in this passage, and in many others, the poet terms his little *kingdom*.

In the 13th Canzone (*Se l' pensier*), the poet addresses himself to a rivulet or fountain, on the borders of which his mistress was wont frequently to walk. In the 14th Canzone (*Chiare fresche e dolci acque*), he addresses the same stream, in which he says, she was often wont to bathe her beautiful limbs. That the poet here alludes to some retired and solitary spot amidst the woods and wilds, there is every reasonable

ground to believe. It is undoubtedly to the same sequestered scene that he refers in the 129th sonnet:

*Lieti fiori, e felici, e ben nate erbe  
Che madonna pensando premer sole;  
Piaggia, ch'ascolti sue dolci parole,  
E del bel piede alcun vestigio serbe;  
Schietti arboscelli, e verdi frondi acerbe;  
Amorosette e pallide viole;  
Ombrose selve, ove percote il sole  
Che vi fa co' suoi raggi alte, e superbe;  
O soave contrada; O puro fiume,  
Che bagni il suo bel viso, e gli occhi chiari.  
E prendi qualità dal vivo lume;  
Quanto d'invidia gli atti onesti e cari!  
Non fia in voi scoglio omai che per costume  
D'arder con la mia fiamma non impari.*

O happy flow'rs and herbs her steps have press'd,  
When strolling pensively along your banks;

Scenes, which have heard her angel-voice, and borne  
The print of her dear feet ! Ye leafy shrubs,  
Pale violets ; ye dark and solemn groves,  
Sweet region of delight ; and thou pure stream,  
That ow'st thy lustre to that beauteous face  
And lovely eyes which thy clear waters laved !  
How do I envy you, thrice happy scenes,  
That oft have witness'd all her actions fair,  
And gestures form'd of grace and innocence !  
Ah me ! in all your wilds and deep retreats,  
No rock so rude that has not heard my plaint,  
And taught her echoes to repeat my woes !

The commentators, in endeavouring to identify the scenery to which these poems refer, have, with great appearance of probability, supposed the stream here mentioned to be either the fountain of *Vaucluse* and stream of the *Sorga*, or the rivulet of *Coulon*, near *Cabrières*, where *Laura* is believed to have dwelt ; and to be the same stream in which, when following the



chace, he, one day, surprised his mistress bathing; an incident to which he alludes in the first *Canzone*.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, it is abundantly clear that the scenes above alluded to were solitary and sequestered. This, one should imagine, were sufficiently obvious. But this supposition, contradicting his theory, appears to the Abbé de Sade quite unnatural and absurd. He finds, or figures to himself, a bason or pond in a garden close by the walls of Avignon, which corresponds to a miracle with every

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<sup>1</sup> Un di cacciando sì, com' io solea,  
Mi mossi; e quella fera bella e cruda  
In una fonte ignuda  
Si stava, quando 'l sol più forte ardea.  
Io, perchè d'altra vista non m' appago,  
Stetti a mirarla; ond' ella ebbe vergogna,  
E per farne vendetta, o per celarse,  
L'acqua nel viso con le man mi sparse.

Canz. 1.

thing here alluded to. As to the rivulet of Coulon, says he, it is no less than *a mile and a half* distant from Cabrieres, a circumstance which puts its pretensions out of the question; as this would have been rather too long a walk for a lady, *promenade un peu forte pour une dame*; and Petrarch himself must have crossed a steep hill, and walked at least *four miles and a half*, before he could have seen her there.

In a similar strain of weak and inconclusive reasoning, this author attempts to invalidate the evidence of the sonnet with which Petrarch accompanies his present of the birds,<sup>1</sup> caught at the foot of those hills where lay the birth-place of Laura. Part of the city of Avignon, says the Abbé, is situated on a rocky emi-

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<sup>1</sup> See *Supra*, p. 70.

nence; and although the foot of that rock is now all built over, and included within the precincts of the city, yet, in those days, it *might* have been open ground, and Petrarch *might* there have amused himself in fowling, and *might* have caught the birds in question.

So likewise, in the 183d sonnet (*Il cantar nuovo*,) where the poet describes the pleasures of the morning in the country, the vallies resounding with the sweet song of the birds, and the murmuring of the clear rivulets, <sup>\*</sup> and tells, that, rising early

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<sup>\*</sup> Il cantar nuovo, e 'l pianger de gli augelli  
In su'l dì fanno risentir le valli,  
E 'l mormorar de' liquidi cristalli  
Giù per lucidi freschi rivi e snelli.---  
Così mi sveglia a salutar l' aurora,  
E 'l sol, ch' è seco; e più l' altro, ond' io fui



to hail the morning rays, he had the fortune to see two suns rise at the same moment; the sun that marks the vicissitude of day and night, and Laura, who at that instant eclipsed his radiance by her own: the Abbé, with his usual facility of perversion, cites this sonnet as a proof that Petrarch used frequently to walk the streets of Avignon before day-break, to have the pleasure of seeing his mistress open her window-shutters.

But the most amusing instance of this sophistical perversion of an author's clearest expressions, is to be found in the con-

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Ne prim' anni abbagliato, e sono ancora:

I' gli ho veduti alcun giorno ambedui  
Levarsi insieme, e 'n un punto e 'n un hora  
Quel far le stelle, e questo sparir lui.

Son. 183. part 1.

struction which is attempted to be put on the passage above quoted from the Latin eclogue of Galatea.<sup>1</sup>

*Carpe iter, qua nodosis impexa capistris, &c.*

“Take your way yonder, where you will  
“see the oxen yoked by the neck, and the  
“watch-dogs guarding the entry of a small  
“house.—On the other side of it is the  
“burial-place of Galatea.” This has been  
always reckoned one of the most decisive  
testimonies, that the burial-place of Laura  
was not in the city of Avignon, but in the  
country. It was necessary, therefore, to  
take off the force of this strong piece of  
evidence. It is admitted, on all hands,

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<sup>1</sup> See *suprà*, p. 79.

that Laura is figured under the name of Galatea: but the yoked oxen, and the watch-dogs guarding the entry of a small house, how can they possibly be applied to a church in the city of Avignon, or indeed to any thing else than a farm-house in the country? Nothing is more clear, say the advocates for this hypothesis; the *oxen* yoked by the neck are the *friars* of the convent, the *fratres minores, qui ferunt jugum obedientiæ, laboris et religionis*; the *dogs* guarding the door are the same *friars*, (both dogs and oxen), who may well be termed dogs, because they *bark* so much in their sermons; *frequentes vigilias canum, prædicantium scilicet et latrantium*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Recollectiones Benvenuti de Imola super Bucolico Carmine Francisci Petrarchæ M. SS. Bibl. R.No.



8700. *Carpe viam hac parte quæ ducet nos ad locum Fratrum minorum, quia ibi videbis sepulcrum Lauretæ: Carpe viam hac parte qua tu videbis, Collaboum nodata capistris, id est Fratrum minorum qui ferunt jugum obedientiæ, laboris et religionis: impexa, quia per coronam rasi sunt capite, et ferunt capistra nodosa, scilicet zonas ipsas: et eâ parte qua tu videbis frequentes excubias, vigilias canum scilicet prædicantium et latrantium, et hoc sub parvo tecto ubi videbis canes fuscus, id est fratres; et ille locus habet corpus tuæ Lauretæ. Ergo aspice quia hîc est Laureta, amica Petrarce, qua natura nihil creavit pulchrius, nisi amor noster fallat.* The Abbé de Sade remarks upon this, that M. de la Bastie, who cites the passage in the eclogue of Galatea, *Carpe iter*, as a proof that Laura was buried, not at Avignon, but near some farm-house in the country, “was assuredly not acquainted with this “commentary of the learned Benvenuto de Imola— “and it is but justice to believe that he would “be delighted, were he to return from the dead, to “see the truth now clearly brought to light, and “would abandon at once that false opinion which “he had too readily embraced.” *Mem. de Petr.* tom. 1. note iv. This passage, little short of the ludicrous, is a strong example of the blind af-

fection which an author is apt to entertain for a favourite system which he has the merit of inventing.



*SECTION THIRD.*

I PRESUME I have given a sufficient specimen of the Abbé de Sade's ingenuity in accommodating and bending to his own purpose those passages of the poet's writings which are in the most direct contradiction to his hypothesis; nor would an unprejudiced critic desire a more satisfying proof of its futility, than the miserable shifts to which its defenders are put in order to support it. This hypothesis, however, must yet be more thoroughly can-



vassed; and, for that purpose I shall here give a brief detail of its whole particulars.

The Abbé de Sade endeavours to prove, that the mistress of Petrarch was Laura de Noves, the daughter of Audibert de Noves, a gentleman of noble birth in Provence; that she was born at Avignon, in 1307 or 1308; that she was married, in 1325, to Hugh de Sade, the representative of a very ancient and honourable family in the territory of Avignon, to whom she bore eleven children; that she died at Avignon, in the year 1348, and was interred in the burial-place of the house of Sade, in the Church of the Cordeliers in that city. The Abbé, who is himself a younger son of that family, has proved the whole of those leading circumstances,

in the history of his *progenitrix* Laura de Noves, by authentic documents in the archives of the house of Sade; and he has particularly established the certainty of these facts, "that this Laura, *the wife* of " Hugh de Sade, was born, died, and was " buried at Avignon." If, therefore, it is equally demonstrable that the Laura of Petrarch was neither born, died, nor was buried at Avignon, it is plain she was a different person from Laura de Noves. The evidence of these latter facts we have already seen. It is clear, positive, and unambiguous. It might, therefore, be sufficient to rest the matter here without farther argument; for an hypothesis must fall of itself, when the main props on which it is built are demolished. But I am tempted to go a great deal farther: and, allowing that the question as to the

place of Laura's birth and death were still a matter of doubt; nay, even admitting, for the sake of argument, that the Laura of Petrarch had, according to the tradition current at Avignon, been connected, in some way or other, with the house of Sade, and on that account had been interred in the burial place of that family; supposing, in short, the authenticity both of the note on *Virgil*, and the whole story of the grave, the medal, and the parchment; I shall now proceed to shew, and, as I trust, to prove to absolute conviction, that this Laura, connected, as we shall suppose her, with the house of Sade, and buried in their family-vault, *was never married*.

And here I must previously remark, that the report which, it is allowed, was current at Avignon, that Laura belonged



to the family of Sade, was not that she was *connected by marriage* with that family, but that she was herself a *descendant* of that house. The opinion that she was connected with it by marriage, was never entertained by any one of the family, till it found its origin in the whimsical vanity of this author of the *Mémoires*, the Abbé de Sade, who has endeavoured, in this elaborate work, to convince the world, that he himself is actually sprung from the body of the illustrious Laura. That she was a *daughter* of the house of Sade, had been a tradition, though, as we have seen, a very ill-founded one, for some centuries. “The  
“ opinion regarding Laura,” says Velutello,  
“ which was current at Avignon, may  
“ have, in a great measure, arisen from  
“ one Gabriel de Sade, an old nobleman  
“ of that city, with whom I happened to

“ converse a great deal at two different  
“ times, when I was at Avignon. He set  
“ forth, that he was descended from one  
“ Hugh de Sade, a brother of John, who  
“ was *the father of Madonna Laura*, whom  
“ he understood to have been the same  
“ who was celebrated by Petrarch; and  
“ he told me, that this John de Sade had  
“ some possessions at Gravesons, about two  
“ leagues from Avignon, where he lived  
“ always in summer, but passed the winter  
“ at Avignon; and that this Laura, the  
“ daughter of John de Sade, was, after  
“ her death, interred in the family burial-  
“ place, in the Church of the Cordeliers.  
“ But,” continues Velutello, “ what con-  
“ vinced me that this old man’s story was  
“ altogether a fiction, was, that being ask-  
“ ed at what time this Laura lived, he said,  
“ that, by a certain testament which he

“ had seen, she must have been a grown  
“ woman, between the years 1360 and  
“ 1370: Now we are certain,” adds Velutello, “ that Petrarch’s Laura died in the  
“ year 1348.”

I quote this passage for two reasons;  
*first*, To show that Velutello, who lived  
within 150 years of the time of Petrarch,  
who had been at the utmost pains to investigate every trace of the history of Laura, (a subject which he has treated in a separate dissertation), and who had himself conversed with this old gentleman of the family of Sade, from whom he supposes the report of Laura’s relation to that family to have actually originated, did not himself give credit to the story, but conjectured it to be a mere fiction, and the offspring of the old man’s vanity; and I mention it, To show, *secondly*, that this re-



port, thus traced nearly to its origin, did not make Laura a *married woman*, or connected with the house of Sade by marriage, but a *daughter* of one of that family, namely of John de Sade. At this time, therefore, when it may be presumed the relation in which this celebrated person stood to their house, if there was any truth in it at all, must have been better known than it is now, we find there is not the smallest idea of that hypothesis, which the learned Abbé is so anxious to establish, namely, that she was connected with his family by marriage. Instead of being the wife of a M. de Sade, and the mother of a numerous progeny, we find, on going back two centuries, that the family themselves believe her to have been a *daughter* of one of that house; nor is it discovered till the present age, which

is above 400 years after the lady's death, that she was the *wife* of their ancestor, the mother of all the surviving branches of that house; and consequently, that from her illustrious blood is sprung the whole race, now existing, of that family, and, among the rest, the ingenious Abbé, the author of this important discovery, which it has been the labour of his life to prove and authenticate.

One should have naturally imagined, that this gentleman, so proud of his ancestry, might have remained content with that portion of renown which appears to have satisfied his forefathers, the attributing to their house, the honour of having produced this illustrious lady. And indeed it is not easy to conceive how, in any just balance of moral estimation, the one

species of adscititious merit should outweigh the other. On the contrary, a rigid moralist would infallibly decide, that more real honour accrued to a family from having produced the pure, the chaste, the coy, the maiden Laura, the model of female dignity and propriety, the object of an ardent, but virtuous affection to the most illustrious character of the age; than from having acquired by marriage, a connection with a lady, who, whatever were her personal charms, had no title to the praise of exalted virtue, or of true female dignity; who, while joined in wedlock to a respectable husband, and the mother of eleven children, continued for above twenty years, to put in practice every artifice of a finished coquette, to ensnare the affection, and keep alive the passions, of a gallant, whose attachment, from the celebri-



ty of his name, was flattering to her vanity.

I must indeed acknowledge, that these notions are drawn from a system of morals with which the Abbé de Sade and most of his countrymen are but very little acquainted. I know that, in the opinion of most Frenchmen, a handsome married woman derogates not in the slightest degree from the rules either of virtue or of strict propriety, while she amuses herself with the gallant attentions of all the young men of her acquaintance; and the most intimate reciprocation of tender sentiments, while it is only an affair of the heart, is termed *une belle passion*.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Our author has even termed this amour, *une passion honnête*, (an honourable passion). Thus, in

is precisely what the Abbé de Sade supposes to have been the connection of Petrarch and Laura. Petrarch besieged her with ardent and importunate solicitations, which had for their object the ordinary rewards of a lover. She never actually dishonoured her husband's bed; but she made no scruple to avow to her lover that her heart was sensible to his flame; though at times she found it necessary to feign a rigour and coldness of demeanour, in order the better to keep

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speaking of Avignon, he says: "Une ville qui fait gloire de l'avoir élevé dans son sein, et d'avoir été le théâtre d'une passion honnête, qui lui a inspiré de si beaux vers." *Mém. de Pet.* tom. i p. 29. And the same expression occurs, tom. i. p. 111. where the Abbé proposes this passion of the poet for the wife of another man, "as a model for all tender and virtuous hearts."

alive the ardour of his passion. "Par ce  
" petit manège," says the Abbé, "cette  
" alternative de faveurs et de rigueurs bien  
" ménagée, une femme tendre et sage  
" amuse, pendant vingt et un ans, le plus  
" grand poëte de son siècle, sans faire la  
" moindre brèche à son honneur." *Mém.  
pour la Vie de Pet. Préface aux François,  
&c.* And in the following passages he de-  
scribes this *petit manège* more particu-  
larly :

" Laure, qui ne vouloit ni se donner à  
" lui, ni le perdre, n'eut pas plutôt apperçu  
" les nouveaux efforts qu'il faisoit pour bri-  
" ser ses fers, qu'elle mit en usage pour l'y  
" retenir les petites ruses qui lui avoient  
" jusqu'alors si bien réussi : air moins sé-  
" vère, regards plus doux, petits mots en  
" passant," &c. *Mém.* vol. ii. p. 311.—  
" Laure ne pouvoit se résoudre à perdre



“ un amant de cette trempe, qui l’aimoit  
“ depuis onze ans, et qui faisoit de si beaux  
“ vers pour elle : le rencontrant un jour  
“ dans les rues d’Avignon, elle jetta sur lui  
“ un de ces regards qui savoient si bien le  
“ ramener.” *Ibid.* p. 383. — “ Elle le  
“ traitoit avec rigueur toutes les fois qu’ il  
“ entreprenoit de déclarer ses feux ; mais  
“ quand elle le voyoit au désespoir, prêt à  
“ se rebuter et à abandonner l’entreprise,  
“ elle le ramenoit bien vîte par quelque  
“ faveur légère.” *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 300. —  
“ Ces petites ruses d’une *coquetterie inno-*  
“ *cente*, que Laure savoit si bien mettre  
“ en œuvre, eurent bientôt produit leur  
“ effet ordinaire.” *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 386. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would ask if it is by these traits of resemblance, these artful glances, *petits mots en passant*, *doux regards*, these *ruses d’une coquetterie innocente*, as it

From the passages above-quoted, we may judge what idea this reverend Abbé has formed to himself of the character of a respectable married woman, and the mother of a family; *une femme tendre et sage*, who has the art to keep alive, by all the tricks of a coquette, the passions of her gallant for no less than twenty-one years; and all this *sans faire la moindre breche à son honneur*. Observe too, that, for the better part of this period of fascination, the lady herself could owe little of her power to her personal charms; for, if

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is here termed, that we recognise the Laura of Petrarch? Can any thing be more dissimilar? *Scisne*  
*"de ea muliere mentionem tibi exortam, cujus mens*  
*"terrenarum nescia curarum caelestibus desideriis ar-*  
*"det; in cujus aspectu, siquid unquam veri est, divi-*  
*"ni specimen decoris effulget, cujus mores consumma-*  
*"tæ honestatis exemplar sunt."* Petr. de Cont.  
 Mund. Dial. 3. .

our author's hypothesis be true, and Laura de Noves, the wife of Hugh de Sade, was the mistress of Petrarch, this lady must have been a grown woman before her marriage in the year 1325; she had been married three years before Petrarch first saw her: she bore eleven children in the period of their acquaintance; and she died when she was about 40 years of age, *with all the symptoms of an exhausted constitution*. Yet all the while, this hackneyed and antiquated coquette, regardless of the character of a wife and a mother, is practising her *petit manège* of alternate favours and rigours, to turn the head of an infatuated *inamorato*, whose passion was in itself an affront to virtue and morality, and amuse him for a lifetime with the expectation of favours which she is determined never to grant. Such, in the system of



the Abbé de Sade, is the all-accomplished Laura, and such the respectable and virtuous Petrarch. How absurd, how disgusting, how contemptible the one: how weak, how culpable, how dishonourable the other!

But let us now examine the particulars of that evidence on which this author has built an hypothesis, so degrading to those characters whom he professes at the same time to venerate and admire.

The Abbé de Sade has, in a note at the end of the first volume of his work, given a short abstract of the arguments which he has drawn from the works of the poet himself, to show that the Laura of Petrarch was a married woman. They are as follows: <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In a small pamphlet, entitled "*An Essay on the Life and Character of Petrarch*," written by the au-

“ Almost all the world,” says he, “ has  
“ believed that Laura was unmarried :  
“ *Presque tout le monde a cru que Laure*  
“ *étoit fille.* Velutello lays it down as a  
“ proposition absolutely certain ; *Per cosa*  
“ *certa habbiamo da tenere che non fosse mai*  
“ *maritata.* Nevertheless,” says he, “ it is  
“ an undoubted truth that she was a mar-  
“ ried woman. Petrarch himself express-  
“ es it in such a manner as to put it be-  
“ yond all question.

“ *Imò,* In speaking of Laura, he terms  
“ her, in his Latin works, always *mulier* and

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thor of the present Essay, and printed in 1784, a  
brief summary is given of the Abbé de Sade’s argu-  
ments, proving Laura to be a married woman, to  
which the answers are in substance much the same  
with what the reader will find here, though they are  
now given in a more ample form, and strengthened  
by much additional matter of proof from the writings  
of Petrarch.

“*fœmina*, and never *virgo* or *puella*; and  
“in his Italian works, always *madonna* or  
“*donna*, and never *vergine*, *donzella*, appella-  
“tions always applied to unmarried  
“women, and which sound so peculiarly  
“graceful in both languages.

“*2dò*, In sonnets 10, 162, &c. the poet  
“speaks of the dress of Laura, of the gar-  
“lands she wore on her head, of the jewels  
“and pearls with which she braided her  
“hair; and in sonnets 151, and 158, he  
“mentions the magnificence of her gar-  
“ments. Now, in the age of Petrarch,  
“the young unmarried women wore  
“neither garlands, nor pearls, nor jewels;  
“they were dressed in a very simple man-  
“ner, and appeared very little in public.

“*3tiò*, In sonnets 152, and 185, Pe-  
“trarch complains, that *jealousy* often de-  
“prived him of the pleasure of seeing



“ Laura. Some commentators have in-  
“ deed supposed this to be meant of the  
“ jealousy of her parents, watchful over  
“ the honour of their daughter : but this  
“ is a forced and unnatural construction ;  
“ for the term jealousy, *gelosia*, has never  
“ been applied to the watchful care of pa-  
“ rents for the honour of their children.

“ 4tò, Petrarch, with the intention of  
“ celebrating the victory which Laura had  
“ gained over love, composed, after her  
“ death, a poem, entitled the Triumph  
“ of Chastity, *Trionfo della Castità*. If  
“ Laura had been a virgin, it is clear that  
“ he would have entitled his poem *Trionfo*  
“ *della Virginità*. In this poem, too, he  
“ would have given Laura *virgins* for her  
“ attendants, and not *married women*.  
“ Now, those who follow Laura to the  
“ Temple of Chastity, are Lucretia, Pene-

“lope, Judith, Dido, the Greek Hippo,  
“Hersilia, &c. all married women. The  
“single exception is a Vestal Virgin.”

These, the author of the *Mémoires* acknowledges, after all, amount to nothing more than strong conjectures. Now follows, says he, something more conclusive :

“5tò, Petrarch, in one of his dialogues  
“with St Augustine, in speaking of Laura,  
“says, that her body was exhausted by  
“frequent childbearing ; *corpus ejus cre-*  
“*bris partubus exhaustum*. It is true, that  
“the word *partubus* is thus abbreviated in  
“the manuscript *ptubs* ; and, as it was for-  
“merly the current opinion that Laura  
“was unmarried, those who had the  
“charge of printing the Latin works of  
“the poet, have thought proper to inter-  
“pret the abbreviation *perturbationibus*,  
“and to print it so in all the editions of

“ those works: But it ought certainly to  
“ be read *partubus*, for these good reasons:  
“ *first*, That the epithet *crebris* means a re-  
“ petition of acts, and therefore applies  
“ better to acts of childbearing than to  
“ passions. If the author had meant the  
“ latter, he would have coupled the noun  
“ with *multis*, instead of *crebris*. But what  
“ passions can we suppose to have ex-  
“ hausted the constitution of the most  
“ prudent and modest of women, who led  
“ a life so simple and so uniform? In the  
“ *next* place, Messrs Caperonnier, Boudot,  
“ and Bejot, of the King’s Library, who  
“ must be allowed to be good judges of  
“ the abbreviations that occur in old ma-  
“ nuscripts, have decided, that *partubus* is  
“ the proper reading.”

Such is the whole of that evidence,  
drawn by the Abbé de Sade from the



works of the poet himself, in support of this new hypothesis, that Laura was a married woman. On this evidence, which, it will be allowed, is of itself extremely inconclusive, I shall now make some remarks. I take the author's arguments in the order in which they stand.

1mò, The words *mulier*, *fœmina*, in Latin, and *donna*, *madonna*, in Italian, are equally applicable to married and to unmarried women. *Mulier* and *fœmina* mark the sex alone, without reference to the state or condition. Isidorus, in his *Origines*, l. xi. c. 3. says: "*Dicitur igitur mulier secundum fœmineum sexum, non secundum corruptionem integritatis; nam Eva statim facta de latere viri, et nondum contacta a viro, Mulier appellata est, dicente Scripturâ, Et format eam in mulierem.*" Thus too, in the Roman law, where there is the utmost

precision in the use of terms, *mulier* and *fœmina* are indiscriminately applied to unmarried and to married women. In the 17th law of the *Codex, de donat. ante nuptias*, the title bears; “*Donatio ante nuptias facta mulieri in minori ætate, non indiget insinuatione,*” &c. Faber, in his *Thesaurus*, observes, on the word *mulier*; “*Variè accipitur vox; aliquando enim communiter de sexu dicitur, et omnem ætatem ac conditionem ejus amplectitur; itaque et de puellis usurpatur,*” &c.

In the same manner, *donna* and *madonna* are used by the Italians, when speaking either of unmarried or of married women. Every Italian poet terms his mistress *donna* and *madonna*. Thus Ariosto, in the beginning of the 35th canto of the *Orlando Furioso*, says,

Che salira per me, Madonna, in cielo;

and in his 1st elegy,

Non e assai Madonna mesi e anni

La fra speme e timor sin qui sospesa?

Thus Guarini, in the *Pastor Fido*, att. 1.

La fede in cor di donna, se pur fede

In donna alcuna (ch'io no'l so) si trova, &c.

and again,

Bella donna e gentil, sollecitata

Da numerosa stuol di degni amanti,

Se d'un solo e contenta, e gli altri sprezza

O non e donna, O se pur donna, e sciocca.

Thus too, Boccacio, in the introduction to the *Decamerone*:

Gratiose e nobili donne, meco pensando, &c.

A thousand instances of the same kind might be given, to show, that this criticism of the author of the *Mémoires* on the



words *mulier*, *fœmina*, *donna* and *madonna*, has no solid foundation.

2dò, The author of the *Mémoires*, when he says that, in the age of Petrarch, the unmarried women were always simply dressed, and that the use of garlands, of pearls, and of jewels, was peculiar only to such as were married, assumes a fact of which there is no evidence. Muratori, in his twenty-fifth dissertation, *on the dress of the middle ages*, proves, that, in the north of Italy, about the time of Petrarch, the dress of the women was remarkably splendid; and he makes no distinction between the dress of the married, and of the unmarried women. He quotes a monk, Galvaneus, who, inveighing against the luxury of the times, says: “*Mulieres si-  
militer in pejus omnia mutaverunt. Ipsæ  
namque stragulatis vestibus, scopato gut-*

“ ture et collo redimitæ fibulis aureis, gy-  
“ rovagantur. Sericis et interdum aureis  
“ indumentis vestiuntur. Crinibus crispa-  
“ tis more alienigenarum capite perstrin-  
“ guntur. Zonis aureis supercinctæ, Ama-  
“ zones esse videntur.” Murat, *Antiq. Ital.*  
tom. ii. p. 417.—If such was the splendid  
attire of the women in the north of Italy,  
the court at Avignon, importing thence  
both its manners and its fashions, would  
not, it is probable, be behind their models  
in dress, as in every other species of luxu-  
ry. We have the authority of the Abbé  
de Sade himself for affirming, that, under  
the pontificate of Clement VI., the dress of  
the women at the court of Avignon was  
splendid and luxurious in the extreme,  
(*Mém. de Pet.* tom. ii. p. 92.); and that  
this affectation had reached even the lower

classes, appears from a proclamation, which it was found necessary a short time afterwards to issue, prohibiting the use of gold, silver, ermines, or silk, in apparel, to all women, unless the relations of the Pope, the wives and *daughters* of the Lord Mareschal and Lord Vicar, the Baronesses, and the Ladies of quality of the city.<sup>1</sup> Now, from the evidence of this document, extending the exception to the *wives* and *daughters* of

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<sup>1</sup> "Quod nulla domina, seu mulier, cujuscunque conditionis existat, exceptis dominabus de parentela domini nostræ Papæ, et uxorum ac filiarum domino- rum Mareschalli et Vicarii, et exceptis etiam dominabus baronissis et majoribus in civitate habitantibus, nunc et in futurum ausa sit portare in aliqua rauba seu veste, aliquem reversum de subtus nec de supra, neque in martis variorum, erminiorum, seu quarumcunque aliarum pellium, seu rerum, sive de auro, de argento, nec de serico." *Præconisationes anni 1372.*---*Mém. de Pet.* tom. 2. p. 92.



persons of a certain rank, we are undoubtedly warranted to infer, that this splendour and luxury of dress of the ladies of Avignon, was common to both the unmarried and married women. We know for certain that Laura was a woman of noble blood. Of this the poet informs us in numberless passages of his writings. Considering, therefore, her rank and condition, her dress will certainly appear to display no extraordinary magnificence. In the 10th sonnet, (*Sela mia vita*) the poet says no more than that his mistress wore garlands and green clothes.<sup>1</sup> In the 162d sonnet, (*L'aura serena*) he says, that her hair, which formerly she wore loose, was now braided and adorned with pearls and

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<sup>1</sup> E lassar le ghirlande, e i verdi panni,---

jewels ;<sup>1</sup> a customary distinction of dress, as Castelvetro remarks, between young girls (*fanciulle*), and grown women. Now, if the remark of the Abbé de Sade be just, that this mode of adorning the hair was peculiar to married women, those passages which indicate that Laura adorned her hair in that manner will prove a great deal more than the Abbé intends they should do: for they will demonstrate that Petrarch was acquainted with Laura while she was unmarried; as they prove, that he had formerly seen her while she wore no ornaments on her head, but appeared with her hair loose, unbraided, and quite unadorned, as the Abbé supposes to have been the fashion of the young unmarried

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<sup>1</sup> E le chiome hor avvolte in perle, e'n gemme,  
Alhora sciolte, &c.

women. Thus, in the 162d sonnet, above quoted, the poet says: "The serenity of  
" the air, and the return of spring, bring  
" to my remembrance the time when I  
" first felt the power of love, when I  
" first beheld that beautiful countenance,  
" and saw those golden locks loosely wa-  
" ving in the wind, which are now braided,  
" and adorned with pearls and jewels."<sup>1</sup>  
And so likewise, in the 69th sonnet, p. 1.

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<sup>1</sup> L' aura serena, che fra verdi fronde  
Mormorando a ferir nel volto viemme  
Fammi risovvenir, quand' Amor diemme  
Le prime piaghe, sì dolce e profonde;

E 'l bel viso veder, ch' altri m'asconde  
Che sdegno e gelosia celato tiemme;  
E le chiome hor avvolte in perle e'n gemme,  
Alhora sciolte, e sovra or terse bionde:

Le quali ella spargea sì dolcemente,  
E raccogliea con sì leggiadri modi,  
Che ripensando ancor trema la mente.---



describing the time when he first saw Laura, he says: "Those golden tresses  
"were then loosely scattered by the wind,  
"which twisted them into a thousand  
"beautiful ringlets:"

Erano i capei d'oro al' aura sparsi,  
Che 'n mille dolce nodi gli avvolgea.

If, therefore, as the Abbé de Sade maintains, this braiding and adorning of the hair marked the distinction between the married and unmarried women in the age of Petrarch, he must admit, on the evidence of those passages where her head-dress is so described, that, at the time when the poet was at first acquainted with Laura, and became enamoured of her, as she wore her hair in loose ringlets, she was *unmarried*; a circumstance destructive of his whole hypothesis: for Laura de Noves

was married to Hugh de Sade, as the Abbé has shown from his own family documents, in 1325; and Petrarch saw *his* Laura for the first time in 1327. I shall leave the Abbé and the partizans of his hypothesis to extricate themselves from this dilemma the best way they can: for my part I see no possible means of an escape.

But the author of the *Mémoires* has, on the subject of the dress of Laura, either wilfully perverted, or most palpably misunderstood, his authorities. He has quoted sonnets 151, and 158,<sup>1</sup> in proof of that richness of apparel, which he argues to be characteristical of her being a married woman. The first of these sonnets is a comparison of the poet's mistress to the

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<sup>1</sup> Sonnets 152, and 159, of the Venice edition, 1756.

fabled *phœnix*, which is thus described by Pliny: “Auri fulgore circa colla, cætera  
 “purpureus, cœruleam roseis caudam pen-  
 “nis distinguuntibus.” *Nat. Hist.* lib. 10.  
 c. 2.—So Petrarch, in this sonnet, de-  
 scribes his beautiful Phœnix; her lovely  
 hair *artlessly* floating in ringlets about her  
 neck, and thus forming a natural necklace  
 of gold; her shoulders covered with a pur-  
 ple garment bordered with azure;<sup>1</sup> thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Questa Fenice de l'aurata piuma  
 Al suo bel collo candido, gentile  
 Farma senz' arte un sì caro monile,  
 Ch' ogni cor addolcisce, e 'l mio consuma:

Forma un diadema natural.——

Purpurea vesta d'un ceruleo lembo  
 Sparso di rose i belli homeri vela;  
 Novo habito, e bellezza unica e sola.

Fama nell'odorato, e ricco grembo  
 D' Arabi monti lei ripone e cela;  
 Che per lo nostro ciel sì altera vola.



in every point resembling the famed Arabian bird. The former part of this description, which applies to the hair, is evidently characteristic of the utmost simplicity of female decoration, and therefore lends no aid to the Abbé's laboured argument. The latter part describes only the colour of the garments of Laura, and might apply equally to a fine lady, and to a country maiden who wore a crimson cloak with a blue border. As to sonnet 158, which is quoted as proving that Laura wore garments embroidered with gold and pearls, our author has fallen into a palpable mistake, in giving a literal meaning to what is entirely figurative. The poet is there speaking, not of the dress or garments, but of the personal qualifications and shining accomplishments of his mistress.

Vedi quant' arte dora, e' mperla e' nnostra  
L' habito eletto.

This passage Castelvetro thus properly interprets: "*Abito* in questo luogo significa *corpo*, che e come abito e vestimento all'anima, il quale e ornato di maravigliose bellezze e maniere, che egli significa, dicendo, che l'arte lo 'ndora e 'mperla, e' nnostra, come sì sarebbe una veste." And such is the interpretation which all the commentators have put on this passage.

3tiò, In sonnet 162,<sup>1</sup> the poet complains, that *jealousy* had deprived him of the sight of Laura; and in sonnet 185,<sup>2</sup> the female companions of Laura make the same complaint: but in neither of the

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<sup>1</sup> L'aura serena.

<sup>2</sup> Lieti, e pensosi.

passages alluded to is there the smallest hint that the jealousy of a husband was here meant. Unless, therefore, the author of the *Mémoires* shall shew, that there can be no jealousy except in the breast of a person who is married, his argument concludes nothing. The word *gelosia*, in Italian, is no more limited in its signification than the English word *jealousy*; both meaning the resentment of every species of rivalry. In the first of the sonnets above mentioned, it is most probable that the poet meant that Laura's own jealousy had frequently deprived him of the happiness of seeing her.<sup>1</sup> What gives the

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<sup>1</sup> On this passage Castlevetro thus remarks: "Si potrebbe intendere di Laura che, sdegnata col Petrarca, gli nascondesse il viso: O, perche fosse inna-



strongest support to this interpretation, is the association of disdain with jealousy :

E 'l bel viso ch' altri m 'asconde  
Che sdegno o gelosia celato tiemme,

And we know, from some particulars of the life of Petrarch, that Laura had sufficient cause both of disdain and jealousy.<sup>1</sup>

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morata di se stessa, e avesse gelosia che il Petrarca la vedesse :

Se forse ogni suo gioia  
Nel suo bel viso è solo,  
E di tutt' altro è schiva                      Canz. 13.

Ma meglio è d'intendere de' parenti,  
Dogliose per sua dolce compagnia  
La qual ne toglie invidia e gelosia.—  
Son. 185."

<sup>1</sup> We learn from his familiar letters, that his passion for Laura had not restrained him from the indulgence of a meaner amour, with a woman of low manners and of a disagreeable temper ; a passion, of course, in which the heart had no share ; and that, in consequence of this connection, which was even

It is in this mortifying feature, of an otherwise most virtuous and exemplary character, that we are to seek for the true reason of those changes of deportment which Laura manifested towards her lover, those alternate marks of favour and of cold reserve, and that tedious protraction of the final reward of a passion, unexampled in its ardour and duration.

In the 185th sonnet, where the female companions of Laura complain that envy or jealousy had deprived them of her company, the expression may be meant either

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of some years duration, and was a source to him of much disquiet, he had a natural son and daughter; of the former of whom we find frequent mention made in the course of those letters. Here, therefore, was sufficient motive both of *disdain* and *jealousy* to a less exalted character than Petrarch's  
LAURA.

of her own jealousy, as in the former instance, or more probably, in this place, of the jealousy of her parents. “ *Restata in “ casa per invidia o gelosia de parenti,*” says Castelvetro : and the same author remarking that some have suspected from this passage that Laura was a married woman, acutely observes, that the context plainly indicates that the expression will not admit of that construction : Her companions lament, that they are deprived of her company by that envy or jealousy which repines at the happiness of another, as if it were its own misfortune :

Dogliose per sua dolce compagnia  
La qual ne toglie invidia e gelosia  
Che d'altrui ben, quasi suo mal, si dole.

“ The man who is truly jealous,” he well observes, “ cannot be said to repine at “ the happiness of another, *as if it were*



“ his own misfortune; for, in reality, *it is*  
“ his own misfortune.”

4tò, The author of the *Mémoires* is equally ill-founded in the argument he endeavours to draw from the title of the *Trionfo della Castità*, as in most of his other critical remarks. *Castità* in Italian, *castitas* in Latin, and *chastity* in English, are equally applicable to a virgin as to a married woman. Diana is celebrated for her chastity, as well as Penelope. Some of the Doctors have even limited the application of the term *Chastity* to such as are unmarried. “ *Castus et continens,*” says Aquinas, “ *sic differunt, quod castus* “ *dicitur ante nuptias, continens verò post* “ *eas.*”

But, says the Abbé de Sade, had Laura been a virgin, the poet would, in this composition, have given her *virginis* for her

attendants, and not married women. Those who follow her to the temple of Chastity, says he, are all married women, with the exception of a *Vestal Virgin*. Here our author is guilty of an unpardonable misrepresentation. In the poem of the *Trionfo della Castità*, Petrarch, so far from citing examples only of married women, as Lucretia, Penelope, &c. says:

Io non porria le sacre benedette  
Vergini ch' ivi fur chiuder' in rima.---

“I could not comprehend in rhyme all  
“the sacred virgins that were present:”  
and he enumerates the nine Muses,

—Calliope e Clio con l' altre sette ;—<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am well aware of the doubt that has been entertained by certain grave and learned authors, with regard to the *virginity* of the muses. As to Calliope, indeed, the matter was past a doubt ; for her

together with Virginia and the Vestal Tuccia. We have here an example of

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amour with Œagrus, king of Thessaly, was proclaimed by the birth of a son, who made sufficient noise in the world, the famous Orpheus; and therefore Buchanan has very guardedly expressed himself, with respect to her:

Calliope longum cœlebs cur vixit in ævum?

Nempè nihil doti quod numeraret, erat.

*Eleg. in fine.*

For this lady, though a mother, was certainly *cœlebs*, or *unmarried*; and this is quite sufficient to refute our author's assertion that the poet had here given Laura an attendance only of *married* women. As to the other Muses, whatever may have been their failings in private, (and every one of them has suffered from the breath of scandal; see *Menagiana*, t. 4.), their state of *celibacy* is authenticated beyond all question; and I must in conscience believe, that Petrarch had never heard any of those curious and secret anecdotes of the lives of those ladies, which the penetrating research and deep erudition of modern



singular disingenuity in our historian, which, occurring in an instance of easy detection, must justly render suspicious many of those authorities which he pretends to have drawn from private sources, such as the archives of his own and other families, where it is impossible for others to follow him, and investigate the truth of his information. †

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authors has brought to light, otherwise he would not have made them the attendants of his Laura, *married or unmarried*, to the Temple of *Chastity*.

† Yet, though I am thus compelled to censure the very blameable devices which this writer employs to support his hypothesis, I am very far from going the length which Dr Beattie has done, in treating this elaborate work of M. de Sade as a romance of no greater authority than the *Belisarius* and the *Incas* of Marmontel (Sir W. Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, vol. ii. p. 106.) or of regarding, as he does, the whole "to be no better than a job contrived by the book-

Before I leave this argument I must observe, that, by adopting our author's own mode of reasoning, the works of the poet will furnish us with similar evidence, directly destructive of his hypothesis. If the state of Laura, whether married or unmarried, is to be determined from that of her companions or attendants, we find, in many other passages of the poetical

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"seller, and executed by the author." This is an illiberal opinion, which even the carelessness and haste of a private letter cannot excuse. The work of the Abbé de Sade, with the exception of those blêmishes and errors of argument which I have been at some pains to refute, is a most instructive as well as a most amusing work, which throws great light on that important æra when letters began to dawn in Europe, after many ages of the grossest ignorance. I will even venture to say, that no writer has done so much to illustrate the genuine political history of that period, as the author of the *Mémoires de Pétrarque*.

works of Petrarch, that he assigns to her an attendance of virgins. Thus, in the 11th eclogue, in which the companions of Laura lament her death, under the name of Galatea, one of them says :

Addam perpetuos celebret quos mundus honores;  
*Virgineos addam cætus, ritusque verendos.*

And in the 3d eclogue, employing his favourite allusion, the *verdant Laurel*, under which he always figures his mistress, he says :

Purpureâ in ripâ, Laurique virentis ad umbram,  
*Virgineam aspicio, cœlo plaudente choream.*—

The reader may imagine what stress the Abbé de Sade would have laid on these passages, (and indeed most justly) had his object been to prove that Laura was an *unmarried*, and not a *married* woman.

5tò, The last of the arguments advanced by the author of the *Mémoires*, which



he gives as in a manner conclusive on this point, is that which is drawn from the third dialogue with St Augustine, and consists in the interpretation given to the contracted word *ptubs*, which is found in some manuscripts of the works of Petrarch. Our author having frankly enough acknowledged that all the preceding arguments amount only to conjectures, (*ce ne sont là après tout, que de très fortes conjectures,*) might certainly have included the last with equal propriety under the same denomination. His interpretation of the word *ptubs* is evidently nothing more than conjecture; to support which we have only his own opinion, and, as he says, that of Messieurs Capperonier, Boudot and Bejot of the King's Library; although, among the *Pièces justificatives*, we find only the certificate of one of these gen-

tlemen (Capperonier) to that effect; and this expressed with such obscurity and confusion of idea, that we cannot tell what are the characters in the two manuscripts he mentions.<sup>1</sup> But one thing is

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<sup>1</sup> "Certificat de Monsieur Capperonier, Garde de la Bibliothèque du Roi.

"Je soussigné, Garde de la Bibliothèque du Roi, certifie, que dans le manuscrit du Roi, cotté 6502, contenant un ouvrage de Petrarque, intitulé, "*De conflictu curarum propriarum, ad Augustinum*," fol. 13. "cot. l. on lit, et qu'on doit lire: Et corpus illud "egregium morbis ac crebris partibus exhaustum multum pristini vigoris amisit;" lesquels mots se trouvent encore dans le manuscrit cotté 6728. cod. 19. pag. 1. où ils doivent être lus de la même manière. En foi de quoi, j'ai signé le present certificat, en l'hôtel de la Bibliothèque du Roi, ce 16 Juin 1762.

CAPPERONIER."

It does not appear, from this certificate, that the two manuscripts mentioned bear any contraction of this word at all; yet these are certainly the manuscripts to which the Abbé de Sade here refers as bearing *ptubs*. When M. Capperonier, therefore, declares, *on lit, et on doit lire*, so and so, the expression is

plain; before we can admit any conjectural interpretation of this contraction, the Abbé de Sade must prove, that the two manuscripts which bear this contracted word are the *oldest* of all the manuscripts of the writings of Petrarch, otherwise his argument concludes nothing; for, if the more ancient manuscripts have the word at full length, *perturbationibus*, the abbreviation in the later manuscripts must be explained in that manner alone. Now, the Abbé <sup>†</sup> has not taken upon him to maintain, that those two which bear the contraction *ptubs* are the most ancient of all the manuscripts; and his silence on that most material point is a presumption of his knowledge to the contrary. But even were we

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as obscure and inaccurate, as the decision is dogmatical and presumptuous.



to allow that those two manuscripts were actually proved to be the most ancient, let us see what could thence be concluded. All the other manuscripts, which we shall suppose were copied from those two most ancient ones, and all the editions of the printed works have interpreted this contracted word, and written it at full length, not *partubus*, as M. de Sade would have it read, but *perturbationibus*. Now, it will not certainly be denied that the writers of those old manuscripts, and the editors of the oldest printed editions, of the former of whom many were contemporary with the author,<sup>1</sup> and of the

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<sup>1</sup> The writings of Petrarch were in such high esteem during his own age among all who had any pretensions to the character of learned, that many manuscript copies of his compositions were in circu-

latter all lived at no great distance of time from his age, were much better able to read and to interpret the abbreviations of the oldest manuscripts, than those critics who have examined them at the distance of four hundred years from the time when they were written. Even admitting, therefore, that the Abbé had proved his two favourite manuscripts to be the most ancient of all extant, and that the question were simply, What is the most natural interpretation to be given to this contraction? we have, in opposition to his

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lation during his own lifetime, and to this circumstance he was indebted for the extension of his reputation through all the polished nations of Europe. It is probable indeed that the greater part of the manuscripts of his writings are of that date; as the invention of printing, which put a period to the copying by manuscript, was within sixty-six years of the death of Petrarch.

opinion, and that of his friends of the king's library, the direct authority of all the other manuscripts of the works of Petrarch, and all the printed editions, that the word ought to be read not *partubus* but *perturbationibus*.

But I shall make the author of the *Mémoires* a still more important concession; and I shall even put the case, that, instead of *two* manuscripts, perhaps out of two hundred, which read the word contracted thus *ptubs*, while the rest have it at full length *perturbationibus*, the whole existing manuscripts of the author's works had borne the word thus contracted; and that the question were, Whether it ought to be explained *partubus* or *perturbationibus*? This question, it must be allowed, would be best resolved by considering the sense of the context. Let us



now, therefore, see what is thence to be drawn. Petrarch, in the dialogue in question, feigns a conversation between himself and St Augustine, in which the latter is endeavouring to convince him of the impropriety of abandoning himself to the influence of a passion, whose imperious power had enslaved, and rendered subordinate, every other feeling of his nature. Among other arguments, he urges the folly of setting his whole affection on an object of which death might so soon deprive him. Petrarch answers, that he hopes he shall never live to see that day; and observes, that, in the course of nature, Laura being the younger, ought to survive him. To this St Augustine replies, that such an event is nevertheless the most probable: “ *quod corpus illud egregium morbis ac crebris plubs exhaustum multum pristini vigo-*

“*ris amisit.*” Whether ought we, along with all the editors of the printed works of Petrarch, to explain this contraction by *perturbationibus*, frequent disquietude of mind, or conflicts of passion;<sup>1</sup> or, with the Abbé de Sade, to suppose it to mean *partubus*, or child-bearing? The answer immediately made by Petrarch must resolve the doubt. “It is probable,” says St Augustine, “that Laura, though the younger of the two, will soonest be the victim of death; for her constitution, by much sickness, as well as <sup>mental inquietude,</sup> <sup>child-bearing,</sup> has lost a great deal of its former vigour.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Perturbatio*, it must be observed, is the word into which Cicero constantly translates the Greek term, *παθος*, which we commonly render by the English word *passion*; and it is constantly so used by Seneca, and the stoic writers among the Latins.

—“ I too,” says Petrarch, “ have had my  
“ share of mental inquietude, and that  
“ more severe than hers, and I am con-  
“ siderably more advanced in life: *Ego*  
“ *quoque et curis gravior, et ætate provectior*  
“ *factus sum.*” If we admit the common  
reading, the reply is rational and conso-  
nant: “ I have suffered from the same  
“ cause, and more than she has:” If we  
adopt the interpretation of the Abbé de  
Sade, the reply is equally absurd and im-  
pertinent to the observation that precedes  
it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Abbé de Sade seems to have been well aware of the argument which Petrarch’s *reply* afforded against his conjectural reading of *partubus*; for, in the translation which he has given of this entire dialogue with St Augustine, in which he professes to have strictly followed the original, and omitted nothing of any consequence, *retranché fort peu de chose*, he has left out that *reply* altogether. It was



With regard to the critical decision pronounced by the Abbé on the meaning

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a stumbling-block, and he has prudently thrust it aside. The original and the translation are as follows: AUGUST. *Non hoc quæritur, quantum tibi lacrymarum mors illius formidata, quantumve doloris invexerit; sed hoc agitur, ut intelligas quæ semel concussit posse formidinem reverti; eoque facilius, quod et omnis dies ad mortem propiùs accedit; et corpus illud egregium morbis ac crebris perturbacionibus (ptubs) exhaustum multum pristini vigoris amisit.* PETR. *Ego quoque et curis gravior et ætate provecior factus sum: itaque illâ ad mortem appropinquante, præcucurri.*—*Ab. de Sade's translation.* AUGUST. Je ne vous ai rapellé ce souvenir que pour vous faire voir que ce n'est pas un événement impossible, d'autant plus que ce beau corps, l'objet de votre admiration, de votre culte, épuisé par les maladies, et par plusieurs couches, a déjà perdu beaucoup de sa force et de son éclat. PETR. Apprenez que ce n'est pas le corps de Laure que j'aime. C'est une ame fort supérieure à tout ce qu'on voit dans ce monde. Thus Petrarch's reply: "*Ego quoque et curis gravior et ætate provecior factus sum,*" is altogether

of the word *creber*, viz. that it imports a repetition of *acts*, and that it cannot with propriety be applied to *passions*; it had certainly been proper that he had supported this judgment either by some authorities of professed grammarians, or examples from classical writers. He has done neither; and that for the best of reasons: he had none to produce. *Creber*, as we find from the best authorities, is used precisely in the sense of *frequens* or *assiduus*; and is therefore, with perfect propriety, applied as well to passions as to acts. He observes, that, had *perturbationibus* been the proper reading, the author would have coupled it with *multis*, and not with *cre-*

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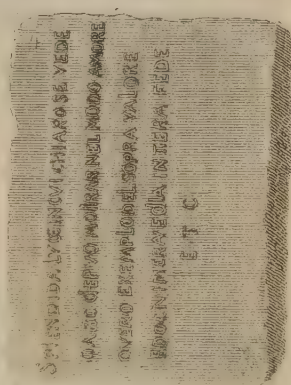
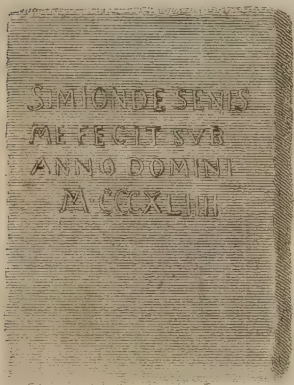
suppressed, and a totally different sentiment put in its stead. This little artifice requires no commentary.

*bris*; a remark betraying ignorance of grammatical precision: for who is there that needs to be told that *multus*, applying to number, can with no propriety be employed to denote frequency of repetition?

But the author of the *Mémoires* asks, What passions we can suppose to have exhausted the constitution of the most *prudent* and *modest* of women, who led a life so *simple* and so *uniform*? To this I answer by another question: How can we, ignorant as we are of the private and domestic history of this lady, pretend to say what causes she might, or might not have had, of anguish and disquiet? How many women of prudence and of modesty, are, from unavoidable circumstances of situation, the victims of mental inquietude; and experience, even in a life of the utmost privacy and retirement, the keenest



anguish, from the turbulent passions, the malevolence or the caprice, of those with whom they are connected.



1711

## SECTION FOURTH.

I HAVE now, as I trust impartially, canvassed the whole of those arguments drawn by the author of the *Mémoires* from the works of Petrarch himself, or what may be termed the intrinsic evidence in support of the material part of his hypothesis, namely, that Laura was a married woman; nor do I think I presume too much when I say, that I have shown their absolute insufficiency to prove that proposition. The question might therefore be safely left here;



in the confidence that an hypothesis which is newly brought forward<sup>1</sup> in opposition to long-established belief, and the concurring assent, for ages, of all who have been conversant with the matter of inquiry, and which is shown to rest on no basis, either of historical evidence or of

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<sup>1</sup> This hypothesis may certainly be termed a new one; since, although Tassoni, and some of the commentators on the sonnets of Petrarch have, in their observations on certain passages which the Abbé de Sade produces as proofs of his theory, remarked, that a *suspicion* might thence arise that Laura was a married woman, none of them have ventured to affirm (as our author) for certain, that she was so. On the contrary, Velutello's conclusion, after confessing the very imperfect information which could be collected relative to the family, state, and condition of Laura, is: "*Per cosa certa habbiamo da tenere ch' ella non fosse mai maritata.*"—"We must hold it for a point absolutely certain, that she was never married."

sound reasoning, does not require to be redargued by opposite proof. But, as I have already had occasion incidentally to produce some of those testimonies from the works of the poet himself, which tend most positively to disprove this hypothesis, and an abundance of matter of similar import must offer itself to all who examine those works with any attention, I am prompted to draw yet a little more from this stock of the internal evidence, before I take my leave of the subject.

Imò, Petrarch has composed 318 sonnets, 59 *canzoni* or songs, and 6 *trionfi*; a large volume of poetry, entirely on the subject of his passion for Laura; not to mention a variety of passages in his prose works, where that favourite topic is occasionally treated, and even discussed at very great length. In the whole of these

works, there is not to be found a *single passage*, which intimates that Laura *was a married woman*. Is it to be conceived that the poet, who has exhausted language itself in saying every thing possible of his mistress; who mentions not only her looks, her dress, her gestures, her conversations; but her companions, her favourite walks, and her domestic occupations, would have omitted such capital facts, as her being married, and the mother of many children; married too, as the author of the *Mémoires* asserts, to a man who was jealous of her, and who used her with harshness and unkindness on Petrarch's account?

*2dò*, Would this harsh and jealous husband have permitted this avowed admirer of his wife, this importunate gallant, who followed her as her shadow wherever she went, and attended her in town and in the



country, to see her daily, and converse with her alone, to write to her, to make assignations with her, and to send her presents as tokens of his attachment? Yet, that Petrarch enjoyed all these liberties, is evident from numberless passages of his works.<sup>1</sup> That the poet and his mistress were wont even to walk together in the public gardens, is evident from the incident alluded to in the 208th sonnet, *Due rose fresche*: A friend, who met them

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<sup>1</sup> Son. 41. *Perch, io t' habbia.* Son. 59. *Quando giunse.* Canz. 14. *Perchè quel.* Canz. 15. *Volgendogli occhi.* Son. 49. *Se voi poteste.* Canz. 12. *Perch' al viso.* Canz. 4. *Nel dolce tempo.* Son. 19. *Mille fiate.* Canz. 8. *Si è debile.* *Trionf. di Morte,* cap. 2. &c. &c. In the 42d sonnet, (*Se col cieco desir*), Petrarch complains that Laura had failed to keep an appointment that she had made with him, and in which, he had flattered himself, he was to be indulged in freely declaring his passion.

together in a garden, taking them both by the hand, presented each with a rose, declaring, at the same time, that the sun never shone on a truer pair of lovers.

"Non vede un simil' par d'amanti il sole,"  
Dicea ridendo, e sospirando insieme;  
E stringendo ambedue, volgeasi attorno.

Son. 208.

And that their passion was the common discourse of the public, appears from many passages, where the poet dwells on that circumstance as a matter of regret:

———Sì come al popol tutto  
Favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente  
Di me medesimo meco mi vergogno.—

Son. 1.<sup>1</sup>

3tiò, Petrarch, in the 200th sonnet,

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<sup>1</sup> See a translation of this sonnet, at the end, "*Ye that with favouring ear.*"

(*Real natura*),<sup>1</sup> records the following remarkable anecdote. At a brilliant assembly and festival, given on occasion of the arrival of a foreign prince at Avignon, Laura was present, along with the most distinguished ladies of the place. This prince, whom the poet celebrates as a most amiable and accomplished charac-

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<sup>1</sup> Real natura, angelico intelletto,  
Chiar' alma, pronta vista, occhio cerviero,  
Provvidenza vèloce, alto pensiero,  
E veramente degno di quel petto ;

Sendo di donne un bel numero eletto  
Per adornar il dì festo ed altero,  
Subito scorse il buon giudicio intero  
Fra tanti, e sì bei volti il più perfetto ;

L' altre maggior di tempo, o di fortuna  
Trarsi in disparte commandò con mano,  
E caramente accolse a sè quell' una :

Gli occhi, e la fronte con sembiante umano  
Bacciolle sì, che rallegro ciascuna :  
Me empìè d' invidia l' atto dolce, e strano.



ter, curious to see a lady of whom the compositions of Petrarch had given him so high an idea, eagerly sought her out amidst the crowd, and soon discovered her by her superior beauty and the gracefulness of her demeanour. Approaching her with an air of gentleness united with dignity, and making a sign to the ladies who surrounded her to stand a little apart, he took her by the hand, and (after the fashion of his country) saluted her, by kissing her forehead and her eyes: a mark of regard, says the poet, which was approved of by all the ladies who were present, but which he himself beheld with envy. The commentators are not agreed as to the prince of whom this anecdote is recorded. M. de la Bastie is of opinion that it was Robert, King of Naples, who is known to have distinguished Petrarch by many

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marks of friendship and beneficence, and whom the poet has, in various parts of his writings, celebrated with the highest eulogy: and this is likewise the opinion of Bembo, Daniel, and others. The Abbé de Sade, on the other hand, has adduced some strong arguments to show, that the prince here alluded to was Charles of Luxembourg, son of John, King of Bohemia. The dispute, as to the person, is of no consequence; the anecdote must be admitted as true, and it has ever been regarded as highly honourable both for the poet and his mistress. In that light we are assured it was considered by the ladies who were present; and, as it is no part of the female character, to view with complacency an unmerited preference shown to a rival in beauty or accomplishments, we must hold this as an unequivocal proof, that they

considered this flattering mark of distinction as deservedly bestowed, and, of course, that they regarded the attachment of Petrarch and of Laura as an honourable and virtuous flame. Now, let it be supposed, with the Abbé de Sade, that this lady, thus highly distinguished as the object of the poet's passion, had been the wife of a man of rank and character, the mother of a family, is it possible to believe that this foreign prince, who is described as a paragon in every courtly accomplishment, should have thus openly braved every law of decency and of propriety, and, in a full assembly (met to do him honour) have insulted, not only the husband of this lady, but every woman of honour, or of virtuous character, who was present? Is it to be conceived, that the husband of this lady, strongly impressed with the feelings of



jealousy on the score of this ardent attachment, as this author himself represents him to have been, and who, in all probability, must himself have witnessed the incident here recorded, should have silently and tamely submitted to this gross affront? Is it possible to figure, that the whole assembly should have crowned with their approbation this glaring indignity and violation of decorum?

4tò, Would this jealous husband have not only patiently witnessed the mutual expressions of this ardent passion for the space of twenty-one years, that his wife was alive, but have complaisantly permitted her gallant, or a friend under his character, to embalm the memory of his mistress by a rapturous love-elegy, to be inclosed in her coffin; the last insult which the honour of a husband could sus-

tain? Yet this, we must believe, if we adopt the hypothesis of the Abbé de Sade: For, if the story of the leaden casket has any truth in it at all, (and its supposed truth is the main prop of that hypothesis,) this elegy or sonnet must have been written, either by Petrarch himself, or by a friend assuming his character.\*

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\* Another fact of a nature somewhat analogous may here be mentioned, which the learned Tiraboschi has noticed in his history of Italian poetry. He quotes a manuscript, entitled, *Rosario Odor di vita*, written in 1373 (that is a year before the death of Petrarch,) in which it is asserted as a proof that the love of the poet was a virtuous passion, that "he made as many oblations and alms, and caused to be said as many masses for her after death, as would have drawn her soul out of the hands of the devil, even had she been the most wicked woman in the world, though, on the contrary, she died in a very sanctified manner. "Po' li ha fatto tante limosine, e fatto dire tante messe e orazione con tanta devotione, che s'ella fosse stata

5tò, An amour of this kind, with a married woman, the mother of a numerous family, under whatever colours this reverend author, in the laxity of the morals of his country, may choose to palliate and disguise it, was in itself an offence both against religion and morality, and must have been viewed by the poet himself in a criminal light. But the general morals of Petrarch were exemplary, his virtue was even of a rigid cast; and, if at any time he was overpowered by the weakness of humanity, his mind, naturally of an ingenuous frame, suffered the keenest contrition, and prompted to an ample atone-

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“la più cattiva femina del mondo, l'avrebbe tratta  
“dalle mani del Diavolo, benchè se raxona, che  
“morì pure santa.” *Tiraboschi Storia della Poesia*  
*Ital. cap. iv. § 23. Edit. J. J. Mathias.*



ment, by a sincere avowal of his fault. In this light, however, he never considers his passion for Laura. On the contrary, it appears to have been his glory and pride, and to have exalted him equally in his own esteem and in that of others.

Anima.——

Da lei ti vien l'amoroso pensiero,  
 Che mentre 'l segui al sommo ben t'invia,  
 Poco prezzando quel ch'ogni huom desia:  
 Da lei vien l'animosa leggiadria,  
 Ch'al ciel ti scorge per destro sentero;  
 Si ch' i vo già della speranza altero.

Son. 12.

Hence has my soul her noblest aims deriv'd,  
 From that pure flame; hence rais'd her thoughts  
                   on high,  
 Indignant, spurning what the vulgar train  
 Of earth-born spirits prize. O best of guides,  
 That cheer'st with hopes that proudly lift the soul,  
 And point the path to heaven!——

“ In amore meo,” says Petrarch, in his dialogue with St Augustine, “ nil turpe, “ nil obscœnum, nil denique præter magnitudinem culpabilis.” *Dial. de contemptu mundi.* “ Illa juvenilem animum “ ab omni turpitudine revocavit, unicoque “ retraxit, atque alta compulit spectare.” *Ibid.* “ Amore acerrimo, sed unico et “ honesto, <sup>1</sup> in adolescentia laboravi, et “ diutiùs laborâssem, nisi jam tepescen- “ tem ignem mors acerba, sed utilis, ex- “ tinxisset.” *Epist. ad post.*

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<sup>1</sup> Se voi poteste per turbati segni,  
 Per chinâr gli occhi, o per piegar la testa,  
 O per esser più d'altra al fuggir presta,  
 Torcendo 'l viso a' preghi onesti e degni,  
 Uscir giammai, i' direi ben, che questa  
 Fosse giusta cagione a' vostri sdegni:

Son. 49,

To any person who is acquainted with the poems of Petrarch, and especially with those which were composed after the death of Laura, it must appear the most bigotted perversion of ideas, to maintain that they are consistent with the notion of his cherishing a passion for a married woman. I shall here translate a few passages from those latter poems.

In the 289th sonnet, or the 61st of the second part, written after the death of Laura, we find these strong expressions:

*S' honesto amor, può meritar mercede,<sup>1</sup> &c.*

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<sup>1</sup> *S' honesto amor può meritar mercede :  
E se pietà anchor può quant' ella suole,  
Mercede havrò; che più chiara che 'l sole,  
A madonna ed al mondo è la mia fede.*

*Già di me paventosa, hor sa, nol crede,  
Che quello stesso, ch' or per me si vuole,  
Sempre si volse; e s' ella udia parole,  
O vedea 'l volto, hor l' animo, e 'l cor vede.*



“ If honourable and virtuous love e’er  
“ merited a reward, and if compassion can  
“ aught avail, I shall obtain the recom-  
“ pence of a constancy of affection,  
“ which, towards that dear object, and  
“ in the eyes of the world, was as pure as  
“ the light of heaven. Formerly she mis-  
“ trusted that affection, and was uncer-  
“ tain of the end and object of my pas-  
“ sion. Now she sees my heart and in-  
“ most soul; and thence I trust that in  
“ heaven she now compassionates my suf-  
“ ferings: for oft I behold her in my

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Ond’ i’ spero che ’n fin al ciel si doglia

Di miei tanti sospiri; e così mostra

Tornando a me sì piena di pietate:

E spero ch’ al por giù di questa spoglia

Venga per me con quella gente nostra

Vera amica di Cristo, e d’ honestate.

“ dreams, regarding me with looks full of  
“ tenderness and pity ; and I fondly hope,  
“ that when I too shall have laid aside  
“ this garb of mortality, she will welcome  
“ me to those blest abodes, where all true  
“ followers of Christ, and friends to virtue,  
“ shall dwell for ever in happiness.” Can  
any person who reads this effusion of the  
heart, in which the poet’s affection for  
Laura is combined with the strongest sen-  
timents of religion, believe that the love  
of Petrarch was a criminal and adulterous  
passion ? If he still hesitates on that point,  
let him read the following striking apos-  
trophe in sonnet 302 :

Donna, che lieta,<sup>1</sup> &c.

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<sup>1</sup> Donna, che lieta col principio nostro  
Ti stai come tua vita alma richiede,  
Assisa in alta e gloriosa sede.—

“ O Lady, that now standest in the pre-  
“ sence of God ; as, sure, thy spotless life  
“ has well deserved that place ! O match-  
“ less paragon of all that is excellent in  
“ woman ! Now, with the eyes of Him  
“ who sees all things, thou beholdest my  
“ faithful love, my pure and virtuous af-  
“ fection ; and thou seest, that towards  
“ thee my heart felt the same emotions  
“ while thou wert on earth, as now in  
“ heaven. Oh then, be it thy prayer, that,  
“ in reward of all my lengthened suffer-  
“ ings, I soon may join thee there ! ”

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O delle donne altero e raro mostro,  
Hor nel volto di lui che tutto vede,  
Vedi 'l mio amore, e quella pura fede.—

E senti, che ver te il mio core in terra  
Tal fu, qual hora in cielo.—

. Dunque per ammendar la lunga guerra,  
Per cui dal mondo a te sola mi volsi,  
Prega, ch' io venga tosto a star con voi.



In the end of sonnet 303, immediately following, he thus expresses himself :

Sol un conforto, <sup>1</sup> &c.

“ My only comfort is, that she who sees  
“ my thoughts, may obtain for me that  
“ mercy that I may soon be with her.”

So likewise in the next sonnet, 304. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sol' un conforto a le mie pene aspetto  
Ch' ella che vede tutti i miei pensieri  
M' impetre gratia ch' i' possa esser seco.

<sup>2</sup> O felice quel dì, che del terreno  
Carcere uscendo, lasci rotta e sparta,  
Questa mia grave, e frale, e mortal gonna.—  
E da sì folte tenebre mi parta,  
Volando tanto su nel bel sereno,  
Ch' io veggia il mio *Signore*, e la mia Donna.

The above is evidently an allusion to the fine apostrophe which Cicero, in the dialogue *De Senectute*, puts into the mouth of the elder Cato, “ *O praeclarum diem, &c.*”

“ O happy day, when, issuing from this  
“ earthly prison, and throwing off the  
“ spoils of mortality, bursting from this  
“ cloud of darkness into the splendour of  
“ eternal light, I see at once my God, and  
“ the dear object of my love !”

In the Hymn to the Virgin, with which he concludes his sonnets, and which is, perhaps, the most perfect of his compositions, where he confesses all the errors and weaknesses of his life; and when, from the nature of the subject, he must have deemed it nothing less than impiety to have uttered a falsehood, or even to have palliated or extenuated a crime, he takes merit to himself, in the sight of heaven, for his passion for Laura; and thus reasons with the Blessed Virgin, appealing to

that clemency which he supposes her peculiar characteristic : <sup>1</sup>

“ O Blessed Virgin, paragon of clemency and humanity, let the example of the Almighty Being incite thee to show mercy to an humble contrite heart; for if with such strength and ardour of affection I have been capable of loving a frail mortal, what mayest thou not conclude must be my devotion towards Thee, the bright example of all excellence !”

In perfect unison with these sentiments of the poet himself, is that beautiful sonnet,

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<sup>1</sup> Vergine umana, e nemica d' orgoglio,  
Del commune principio amor t' induca,  
Miserere d' un cor contrito umile;  
Che se poca mortal terra caduca  
Amar con sì mirabil fede soglio,  
Che dovrò far di te cosa gentile !—

Canz. 8. part. 2.



which Boccacio, recently after the death of Petrarch, composed in memory of his departed friend. It is formed on that favourite thought, which is most natural to the soul on the near prospect of death :

Or se' salito, caro Signor mio,  
Nel regno al qual salir ancora aspetta  
Ogni anima da Dio a quello eletta,  
Nel suo partir di questo mondo rio.  
Or se' colà dove spesso il desio  
Ti tirò già per vedere *Lauretta*;  
Or se' dove la mia bella *Fiammetta*  
Siede con lei nel cospetto di Dio.  
Or con *Senuccio*, e con *Cino*, e con *Dante*,  
Vivi sicuro d' eterno riposo,  
Mirando cose da noi non intese.  
Deh! s' aggrado ti fui nel mondo errante,  
Tirami dietro a te, dove gioioso  
Vegga colei che pria d' amor m' accese.

Friend of my soul! thou leav'st this guilty world,  
To share the bliss that waits the faithful few,

God's own elect ! To reach those mansions pure,  
Where Laura, gone before thee, ever dwells,  
And draws thee to herself—and where with her,  
My lov'd, my lost Fiammetta, meet compeer,  
Sits in the sight of Heaven's eternal King.  
Now, long escap'd the dull confines of earth,  
Senuccio, Cino, Dante, erst belov'd,  
All-joyful hail thy coming—sure of rest  
And bliss for ever ; where on the wond'ring eye  
Full knowledge beams, denied to mortal ken.  
O then, my Petrarch, point my onward path ;  
Guide my faint steps, till I once more behold  
That angel-form which first inspir'd my love.

Boccacio was himself at this time in a declining state of health, and he died about a year after Petrarch.

6th, In the dialogue above quoted, (*De contemptu mundi*, *Dial.* 3,) where St Augustine is introduced reasoning with the poet, and endeavouring to convince him of the errors of his past life, and particu-

larly to dissuade him from the indulgence of his passion for Laura, to which he was as much a slave after her death, as he had been during her life, the holy father makes use of every persuasive that can be drawn both from religion and morality: Let us attend a moment to the topics which he urges; as a convincing argument thence arises against our author's favourite hypothesis. "The object of your flame (says "St Augustine) is a poor frail mortal, who, "in a few years, must fall a victim to corruption, and return to dust.—This seducer has done you the most irreparable wrongs; she has injured even your immortal soul, by turning its affections to "the creature instead of the Creator.—"Your love is not pure, but is tinged "with sensuality; it is the body more than "the mind that attracts you.—You think



“ of nothing but this idle passion ; it is  
“ your sole object night and day ; it has  
“ driven you from the world into solitude,  
“ and rendered useless all your talents :  
“ even your ambition to obtain the poetic  
“ laurel sprang solely from that idolized  
“ name.—You are now an old man ; your  
“ hairs are grey ; what a shame to play  
“ the fool at your years ! how pitiful to be  
“ thus made the common talk of the pub-  
“ lic ; to be pointed at by the finger of  
“ scorn, as the idle votary of a painted  
“ image ; the mean slave of a proud mis-  
“ tress, who was never really touched by  
“ your passion, but has suffered you to  
“ languish out a lifetime, without any re-  
“ ward of your services !”—Such are all  
the topics urged by St Augustine, in the  
view of curing Petrarch of his unhappy  
passion. Now let me ask whether it is to

be believed, that this holy man, this spiritual confessor, thus anxiously probing his patient's wounds, and *ministering to his mind's disease*, would have failed to use that bitter but salutary remedy, which, to a virtuous temperament, he must have judged to be a sure specific? Would he have omitted the strongest of all arguments to reclaim him from his dangerous error? Would he have forgotten to urge that Laura was the wife of another; and, consequently, that his passion was a crime both in the sight of God and man? Yet, to this purpose, there is not a single word in the whole of that various and laboured argument.

7mò, It will be in vain for a disciple of this new hypothesis to attempt its justification, upon the principle that the love of Petrarch, being entirely of a refined and

Platonic nature, might innocently have for its object a married woman, and the mother of a family. The author of the *Mémoires* himself abandons that ground of argument,<sup>1</sup> which, indeed, cannot be maintained in any consistency with those sentiments which the poet himself has avowed in many parts of his works. St Augustine, as we observe in the foregoing conversation, plainly taxes his penitent with the sensual nature of his passion, and Petrarch does not deny the charge; though he maintains that the personal charms of his mistress were but a secondary object of his affection. In reality, the love of Petrarch was no otherwise distinguished from an ordinary passion,

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<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires pour la Vie de Petrarque*, vol. i. note 21.



than by its fervency and duration. He felt for Laura the same emotions, which an ardent but honourable lover feels for a most beautiful, amiable, and accomplished mistress. He admired the graces of her mind, he revered her virtues, and he was enamoured of the beauties of her person. He owns that he passionately desired the reward of his love in the possession of this treasure. The poet, who expresses himself thus rapturously in the language of ordinary human love, must abandon all pretensions to a Platonic affection :

Con lei foss' io,<sup>1</sup> &c,

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<sup>1</sup> Con lei foss' io da che si parte il sole !  
E non ci vedess' altri, che le stelle,  
Sol una notte ; e mai non fosse l' alba,  
E non si trasformasse in verde selva  
Per uscirmi di braccia.——

Sest. 1. part. 1. *A qualunque, &c.*

" Would that I were with her but a single  
 " night, alone, in darkness, where only  
 " the stars should<sup>d</sup> behold us; and might  
 " that night last for ever! Might she ne-  
 " ver assume a borrowed shape, (like  
 " Daphne), to escape from my arms!"

Deh hor foss' io con vago de la Luna, <sup>1</sup> &c.

" Ah that I were along with Endymion,  
 " the beloved of Luna, laid to rest in some  
 " green wood; and that she who con-  
 " sumes my fleeting days were there alone  
 " with me, or attended only by love, for

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<sup>1</sup> Deh hor foss' io con vago de la Luna  
 Addormentato in qualche verdi boschi;  
 E questa ch' anzi vespro a me fa sera,  
 Con essa, e con amor in quella spiaggia  
 Sola venisse a stars' ivi una notte!  
 E' l di sì stesse, e 'l sol sempre nell' onde!

Sest. 7. part 1. *Non ha, &c.*

“one single night! But might the sun  
 “remain for ever beneath the waves!”

So, in the 58th sonnet,

Pigmalion, quanto lodar ti dei,<sup>1</sup> &c.

“How much, O Pigmalion, hadst thou  
 “reason to be content with thy image,  
 “who enjoyedst a thousand times those  
 “delights, which O that I but could once  
 “taste.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pigmalion, quanto lodar ti dei  
 Dell' imagine tua, se mille volte  
 N' avesti quel ch' i' sol una vorrei.

<sup>2</sup> It is amusing to observe, how even this passage has been strained to admit of an interpretation suited to that Platonic affection which some of his commentators have wished to ascribe to the poet. The pleasures, say they, which Petrarch here expressed his desire of enjoying, were those which would arise on finding the picture of Laura endowed, like Pigmalion's ivory image, with speech and understanding.



These passages leave no room for the supposition of that refined and Platonic affection, which it is pretended a virtuous young man may, without blame, indulge for the wife of another. I enter not into the question, how far even a theory of this kind is reconcileable to strict morality; or whether that species of continued attention, that marked esteem and preference, which at least must be rewarded by a corresponding sympathy and regard for the person who expresses them, is mate-

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But they own, at the same time, that, as Pignatlon's enjoyments are generally believed to have been less refined, the poet has chosen an unlucky allusion; and that the obvious sense of the passage is *rien moins que Platonique*. "Ουτος δ Κυπριος, δ Πυγμαλίων ζεινος, ἐλεφαντινου ἡράσθη ἀγάλματος. Τὸ ἀγᾶλμα Ἀφροδίτης ἦν, καὶ γυμνὴ ἦν. νικᾶται δ Κυπριος τῷ σχημάτι, καὶ συνέρχεται τῷ ἀγάλματι καὶ τοῦτο Φιλοστέφανος ἱστορεῖ. Clem. Alexand. Edit. Sylburg. p. 38.

rially less injurious to the sacred bond of conjugal affection, than a plan of seduction pursued from its ordinary motives. A moralist might perhaps decide, that where the effect of both is the same, the alienation of the affections of a wife; the garb of virtue and of decency, assumed in the former case, is only a higher aggravation of its criminality. But the discussion of this question is superfluous, where the supposition of a Platonic love cannot, as we have seen, be admitted.

And here let me incidentally remark, how little acquainted with the poet's writings must those writers have been, who have doubted altogether the reality of his passion, and have expressed their belief that the LAURA of PETRARCH was only a fiction which gave exercise to his favourite vein of poetry; alledging, in confirmation

of this opinion, the improbability of his supposed constancy to the object of his affection for so long a period after the death of Laura. We have seen, from the preceding quotations, taken from those serious and moral compositions, in which he meant to lay open his whole soul, that his passion for Laura was the predominant feeling of his mind during a great portion of his life. Nor is there any just reason to suspect him of exaggerating when he declares, that he loved her for twenty-six years after her death. In strictness of speech, it may be true that the passion of love cannot subsist without an object, either in hope or in possession; but Petrarch did not, in this instance, talk as a philosopher; he expressed himself as a man. The violence of his grief subsiding into a tender regret, he enumerates and



dwells on her perfections, not with the ardent wishes of a lover, but with a sentiment as powerful; the recollection of what is lost for ever, and the comparison of the happiness of the past, with the mortifying reverse of the present. It is not unnatural to term that sentiment love, which is felt for the loss of a person adored in life.

8vò. *Lastly*, As, therefore, we have every ground for belief that the love of Petrarch for Laura was a real, an honourable, and a virtuous passion, so the works of the poet afford sufficient evidence, that he ardently desired to be united to Laura in marriage, and was even in the near prospect of that happiness :

Amor con quanto sforzo oggi mi vinci !

E se non ch' al desio cresce la speme;

I' cadrei morto, ove più viver bramo.

Son. 64.

Amor mi manda quel dolce pensiero  
Che secretario antico è fra noi due,  
E mi conforta, e dice che non fue  
Mai, com' or, presto a quel ch' i bramo e spero.<sup>1</sup>

Son. 135.

Già incominciava a prender securtade  
La mia cara nemica a poco a poco  
De' suoi sospetti; e rivolgeva in gioco  
Mie pene acerbe, sua dolce onestade:

<sup>1</sup> The Abbé de Sade confesses himself puzzled with this sonnet. He can neither allow that Petrarch loved Laura with an impure and criminal passion, nor that he desired to obtain her hand in marriage. His hypothesis forbidding both suppositions, he is reduced to a terrible dilemma, and is forced to come to this conclusion, *Que les amans ne savent ni ce qu' ils veulent, ni ce qu' ils disent.*" Mem. de Pet. t. ii. p. 280.

Presso era 'l tempo dov' amor si scontra  
Con castitate; e a gli amanti è dato  
Sedersi insieme, e dir che lor' incontra.

Son. 47. part 2.

Tempo era homai da trovar pace o tregua  
Di tanta guerra; ed erane in via forse.

Son. 48. part 2.

Tranquillo porto avea mostrato amore  
A la mia lunga e torbida tempesta.—

Già traluceva a' begli occhi 'l mio core,  
E l' alta fede non più lor molesta.  
Ahi morte ria, come a schiantar se' presta  
Il frutto di molt' anni in sì poche hore!

Son. 49. part. 2.

In supplement of these authorities from the sonnets of Petrarch, may be added that report which was current at the time, or at least among the earliest writers who have given any account of the poet's life, namely, that the Pope, who held Petrarch



in the highest estimation, and to whom he was indebted for several valuable ecclesiastical preferments, was extremely solicitous that he should be united in marriage to Laura, and offered to give him, in that event, a dispensation for retaining his church-benefices. If the story is true, the Pope of whom it is recorded must have been Clement VI., as he is the only one of the Pontiffs, who were Petrarch's contemporaries, to whom these characteristics could apply. M. Fleury, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, is certainly mistaken, when he attributes the proposition here mentioned to Benedict XII. the predecessor of Clement; for Petrarch owed no favour to that Pontiff, whom he has satirized in many parts of his writings, as a man of barbarous dispositions, mean and sordid

propensities, and whose gross ignorance disgraced the high station which he occupied. The anecdote is mentioned by Squarzafichi; as it is likewise by one of the oldest editors of the poems of Petrarch, in the preface to the Venice edition, 1473: though the latter writer erroneously names the Pope Urban V. who did not ascend the papal chair till some years after the death of Laura. This uncertainty with regard to the person is not, however, sufficient to discredit the fact itself, that the Pope, whoever he was, might, from favour to Petrarch, have earnestly desired to see him united to the object of his passion.

The clerical character of Petrarch ought not to be considered as affording any objection to the supposition, that he ardently wished to be united to Laura in marriage. Though enjoying ecclesiasti-

cal preferments, he had never accepted of any charge which conferred a care of souls. He had frequently been solicited with earnestness to accept of a bishopric; but constantly refused it, either from a sense of his own demerits, when weighed against the qualities he thought requisite for that sacred character, or, more probably, (as he himself indeed hints) from a desire to preserve his liberty, and follow, without restraint, that course of life which he found most congenial to his taste. It is probable, therefore, that his views with regard to Laura had their influence on this determination; since he was thus at liberty, merely by the sacrifice of some slender pecuniary emoluments, to change his condition at any time he might think proper. Examples of this kind were at that time extremely common; and



the story above related, if true, is a proof that the Sovereign Pontiffs were even in use to dispense with the resignation of benefices to their particular favourites in those circumstances.

But, whatever weight we may be inclined to give to this anecdote, it is, on the whole, sufficient to our purpose, if, while, on the one hand, we have shewn that there is not the smallest solidity in all that elaborate fabric of argument, which has been brought to prove that Laura was a married woman, we have proved, on the other, from the whole tenor of the writings of Petrarch, the only evidence that applies to the matter, that his affection for Laura was *an honourable and virtuous flame*. On this subject the reflection of M. de la Bastie is equally beautiful, as a sentiment of morality, and

just as an observation on human nature:

*“ Il n’y a que la vertu seule qui soit capable  
“ de faire des impressions que la mort n’efface  
“ pas.”*



*POSTSCRIPT.*

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OF THE PORTRAITS OF PETRARCH AND OF  
LAURA.

**I**N the age of Petrarch, painting was yet in its infancy. Among the earliest names recorded in the history of the art, are Cimabue and Giotto, the latter of whom is mentioned by Petrarch as his cotemporary and acquaintance. In the poet's testament, he bequeaths to Francesco di



Carraria, “ a picture of the Virgin, by  
“ the hand of Giotto, a painter of great  
“ eminence; a piece of which the high  
“ merit is not perceived by the ignorant,  
“ but which is the astonishment of those  
“ who are skilled in the art: *Iconem B.*  
“ *Virginis Mariæ, operis Zotti, pictoris egre-*  
“ *gii—cujus pulchritudinem ignorantes non*  
“ *intelligunt; magistri autem artis stupent.*”

Simon of Sienna, otherwise called Simon Memmi, was a pupil of Giotto, and was honoured with the intimate friendship of Petrarch. He painted the poet's portrait, and, at his particular request, that of Laura. It was the good fortune of this artist to obtain, as the reward of his labour, the record of his name in two sonnets of Petrarch; which, as Vasari remarks, have done more for his reputation than all the works

of his pencil: “ *Fu dunque quella di Simone grandissima ventura, vivere al tempo di Messer Francesco Petrarca, è abbattersi a trovare in Avignone alla corte questo amoro-tissimo poeta, desideroso d’ avere la immagine di Madonna Laura, di mano di Maestro Simone ; perciocche havutala bella, come desiderato havea, fece di lui memoria in due sonnetti ; l’ uno de quali comincia*

*Per mirar Polycleto a provar fiso, &c.*

*E’ l’ altro,*

*Quando giunse a Simone l’ alto concetto, &c.*

*E in vero, questi sonnetti, e l’ averne fatto menzione in una delle sue lettere che comincia Non sum nescius, hanno dato più fama alla povera vita di Maestro Simone, che non hanno fatto, ne faranno mai tutte l’ opere sue. Vasari in vit. di Simone Memmio.*

Besides this portrait of Laura, which he drew at the request of Petrarch, Messer Simone painted Laura and Petrarch in a large picture, which he executed for the church of Sta. Novella, at Florence. Of this Vasari makes the following mention :

*Lavorò poi Simone tre facciate del capitolo di detta Santa Maria Novella, molto felicemente. In cielo si vede la Gloria de' Santi, e Giesù Cristo : E nel mondo quaggiù rimangono i piaceri, e dilette vani in figure humane, e massimamente di donne che seggono : tra le quali è Madonna Laura del Petrarca, ritratta di naturale, vestita di verde ; con una picciola fiammetta di fuoco trà il petto e la gola. E vi ancora la chiesa de Cristo, e la guardia di quella il Papa, lo Imperadore ; il Re, i Cardinali, i Vescovi, e tutti i principi Christiani ; e tra essi a canto a un cavalier di Rhodi, M. Francesco Pe-*



*trarca, ritratto pur di naturale ; il che fece Simone, per rinfrescar nelle opere sue la fama di colui che l'aveva fatto immortale."* Vasari *ibid.* It must be allowed, that Messer Simone, in this picture, paid no high compliment to Laura, when he placed her portrait among the allegorical representations of the *vain delights and pleasures of this life* ; unless we shall suppose that Petrarch, in a philosophic and penitential mood, had authorised the painter to employ this allegory.

There is reason to believe that Simon of Sienna had practised sculpture as well as painting, if we can trust (as I see no reason to the contrary) to the authenticity of an ancient marble basso-relievo of the heads of Petrarch and of Laura, which was discovered about the year 1753, at Florence, in an old house belonging to

a man of rank, of the name of Signor Bindo Peruzzi. This gentleman, a member of the Academy della Crusca, in a letter addressed to the editors of the *Magazzino Toscano*, (which is printed in the beginning of the second volume of the Venice edition, 1756, of the *Rime del Petrarca*,) describes this curious marble, as being a third of a cubit in height, and two palms in breadth. The heads bear the names inscribed, *F. Petrarca*, and *Diva Laura* : and on the back of the one is sculptured *Simon de Senis me fecit, sub Anno Domini 1344* ; and on that of the other, these verses ;

*Splendida luce, in cui chiara si vede*

*Il ben che può mostrar nel mondo amore.*

*O vero exemplo del sopran valore,*

*E d'ogni maraviglia in terra fede. E. t. c.*

The date, 1344, is four years before the

death of Laura, who died in 1348. M. Peruzzi adds, in the same letter, that this piece of sculpture, which probably belonged to Petrarch, had after his death come into the possession of a poet of the name of Peruzzi, who is known to have been a cotemporary and intimate friend of Petrarch; and thus it had remained from that time in the house of his descendants. Of this curious sculpture, which, if resembling the originals, gives no high idea of the personal charms of Madonna Laura, there is an engraving prefixed to the 2d volume of the Venice edition of Petrarch, 1756, and to the 3d volume of the *Mem. de Petrarque*, by the Abbé de Sade; from the former of which is taken the plate, at p. 177 of this Essay.

The Abbé de Sade mentions two other paintings of Laura, by Simon of Sienna,



besides the two which are noticed by Vasari. One of these, a picture in fresco, under the portico of the church of Notre Dame de Dons, represents Laura in a green vestment, at the feet of Saint George on horseback, who delivers her from the dragon. This picture, now much decayed, is said to have been once so exquisite, that Francis I. of France, "le voyant, tressaillit d'admiration, ne se pouvant saouler de le regarder." Mem. de Petr. vol. i. p. 402. The other is a picture of the virgin, at Sienna, which is said to be a portrait of Laura. She is, as usual, clad in green, with her eyes very much cast down: The Abbé remarks, "c' étoit son attitude ordinaire."

Simon de Sienna was not the only painter of that age, who had the honour of painting Petrarch. The Abbé de Sade

mentions "D. Lorenzo Camalduli, qui  
" l'a peint à Florence dans l'Eglise des An-  
" ges, chapelle degli Ardenghelli." Mem.  
de Petr. vol. i. note xii. And we learn  
from the two following anecdotes, men-  
tioned both by the last author, and by M.  
de la Bastie, that, barren as that age was in  
good artists, many pictures were executed  
of Petrarch, by painters who were his co-  
temporaries.

Pandolpho Malatesta, sovereign of Ri-  
mini, had two portraits of the poet, paint-  
ed at different periods of his life; the  
first before he had ever seen Petrarch, and  
knew him only by reputation. Struck  
with admiration of his character, he pri-  
vately sent an eminent artist from Italy to  
Avignon, with instructions to take a draw-  
ing or sketch of the poet, without his  
knowledge. The painter succeeded to his

wish; and Malatesta kept this portrait in his library with the greatest care. Afterwards, when he became familiarly acquainted with Petrarch, he employed another painter, an intimate friend of the poet, to make a second painting from the life; which, though it had the advantage of being much more carefully executed, was not found to be so happy a resemblance as the former hasty sketch. *Mem. Acad. Inscript. tom. 17. p. 449.*

Henry Capra, a goldsmith of Bergamo, who had acquired considerable wealth by his profession, was seized with the rage of becoming a man of letters. He conceived the most passionate admiration for Petrarch, which displayed itself in procuring a great many pictures, sculptures, and statues of the poet, at an immense expence. He bestowed large sums in getting copies



of all his writings; and he made a journey to Milan, for the sole purpose of seeing, and, if possible, obtaining, the acquaintance of this illustrious author. Petrarch, flattered by the old man's regard, or, perhaps, compassionating his folly, received him with great kindness. This turned the goldsmith's head. Nothing would now satisfy him, but that Petrarch should honour his house at Bergamo, by coming to pass a night with him. The poet could not resist his urgent entreaties: he attended him to Bergamo; where he found that this magnificent goldsmith had made most extraordinary preparations for his reception. The commandant of the province, attended by all the troops, and the principal men of the city, were waiting his arrival, to pay him every possible honour. The house of his host was decorated with

the utmost splendour; his bed-chamber hung with gold and purple; and, for the bed itself,—“ l'orfèvre jura que per-  
“ sonne n'y avoit couché, et n'y couche-  
“ roit que luy.” Every apartment of the house was adorned with the poet's picture or his statue. The repast might have suited a crowned head, to give or to receive. The joy which the goldsmith expressed upon this occasion, was so tumultuous and extravagant, that his relations had the most serious fears for his brain; and when he attended Petrarch next day upon his journey homeward, it was not without violence that they separated him from his illustrious guest. *Mem. Acad. Inscript.* tom. 17. p. 453; and *Mem. de Petr.* vol. 3. p. 497.

We may conclude from these anecdotes, that many original paintings and sculp-

tures of Petrarch are yet existing in different parts of Italy; which probably have served as models for the succeeding painters of eminence, in those portraits of the poet, which are mentioned by Vasari and others; and from which the various engravings are taken, that are commonly to be found in the cabinets of collectors, and in different editions of the *Rime del Petrarca*. These facts likewise account for the great difference in resemblance and attitude among the portraits of Petrarch; from their being executed at different periods of his life, and by artists of unequal ability.

Vasari, in his life of Raphael, describing the celebrated painting in the Vatican of mount Parnassus, observes, that this great painter has introduced Petrarch in that picture, among the poets, who are



ranged on either side of the groupe of Apollo and the muses: *Sono vi ritratti di naturale tutti i più famosi, e antichi, e moderni Poeti.*—*Vi è il divinissimo Dante, il leggiadro Petrarca, e l'amoroso Boccaccio.*—By the side of Petrarch, is the portrait of Laura, in her usual green dress; her hair, which is of a golden colour, and floating on her shoulders, encircled, as is that of the poet, with a wreath of laurel; her eyes cast down, with a sweet and melancholy expression. In designing this figure of Laura, Raphael seems to have had in his mind, the beautiful descriptive sonnet:

Erano i capei d'oro à l' aura sparsi  
Che'n mille dolci nodi gli avvolgea :  
E'l vago lume oltra misura ardea  
Di quei begli occhi ch' hor ne son si scarsi :  
E'l viso di pietosi color farsi, &c.

Sonn. 70. part 1.

Of this picture of the Parnassus, by Raphael, there are two old engravings by Marc-Antonio, and by Jacques Matham, and a modern engraving of great merit, by Volpato.\*

Andrea del Castagno, a painter of considerable eminence, who flourished about a century after Petrarch, painted a portrait of him, among the other poets of Italy; as we learn from Vasari, in his life of that artist. *Dipinse in casa di Carducci, hoggi di Pandolphini, alcuni huomini famosi—fra questi è Dante, Petrarca, il Boccaccio, e altri. Vasari, vol. 1. p. 304.*

Vasari, who was himself a very able

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\* An excellent copy of Raphael's mount Parnassus, by Domenichino, which was formerly in the collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds, is now in the possession of the present writer.

artist, as well as a good critic in the art, informs us in his own life, that, among the pictures he painted at Florence, was a portrait of Petrarch: "*Fui forzato a tornarmene a Fiorenza, dove feci alcuni quadri, fra gli altri, uno, in cui era Dante, Petrarca, Guido Cavalcanti, il Boccaccio, Cino da Pistoia, e Guittone d' Arezzo, il quale fu poi di Luca Martini cavato dalle teste antiche loro accuratamente: del quale ne sono state fatte poi molte copie.*"

Philip Tomasini, (Bishop of Citta-nuova) the author of an elaborate, but crude and ill-digested miscellany, entitled, *Petrarca Redivivus*, in which he has thrown

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<sup>1</sup> This picture by Vasari, or one of the copies, is probably in England, as the writer saw an excellent painting, corresponding with this description, sold at Christie's auction-room in Pall-Mall, in 1793.



together all the information he could possibly collect, relative to Petrarch and Laura, has, in the first edition of that work, given two portraits of Petrarch and one of Laura, engraved by H. David, a French artist, of moderate ability, who lived about the middle of the seventeenth century. The two heads of Petrarch bear no resemblance to each other, nor are they similar to any of the other portraits of the poet, though taken, as the author informs us, from ancient pictures; one of which had been in the Colonna family, and thus probably an original, and the other was copied from a manuscript on parchment in the Vatican library, of some of the poems of Petrarch. The two portraits are thus described by Tomasini: “ Interea gemina, curiose  
“ Lector in ipso operis limine frueret Fran-

“ cisci Petrarcae effigie, quam tibi exhibe-  
“ mus, qua licuit solertia e vetustis tabellis  
“ expressam. Diversam quidem sed tem-  
“ pore, non sculptoris arbitrio. Primam  
“ debeo humanitati Leonis Allati, viri Cl.  
“ quæ olim apud Ascanium Columnam,  
“ S. R. E. Cardinalem, e vivo Franc. Pe-  
“ trarcae, jam tum juvenis vultu delineata;  
“ culcullo rubro, laurea fronde insignito,  
“ spectabatur. Alteram provectionis, è bi-  
“ bliothecæ Vaticanæ Petrarcae poemate,  
“ in membranis, an. 1516, manuscripto in  
“ 4to, numero 3198, depromptam, benignè  
“ mecum communicavit vir nobilissimus,  
“ eximiusque litterarum cultor, Cassianus  
“ a Puteo Eques. Quam cucullo rubro  
“ parte interiori, qua frontem tegit, coloris  
“ impluviati, seu fuliginei, subjectâ tunicâ  
“ violaceâ, elegantissimè inibi depictam

“addidit.” *Præloquium Petrarcae Redivivi.*

The portrait of Laura, engraved by *David*, in the first edition of the *Petrarca Redivivus*, was taken, as the author informs us, from an ancient picture, which had formerly belonged to the Colonna family; and he esteems it the genuine work of Simon of Sienna. The *costume* is somewhat like that of most of the figures of Laura, prefixed to the older editions of the *Rime del Petrarca*; but the expression of the countenance is quite different, being heavy and vulgar. In the second and enlarged edition of the *Petrarca Redivivus*, is another engraving of Laura, in a dress and *costume* totally different, and bearing no resemblance to any of the other portraits of the poet's mistress. The latter, we are informed by the Abbé de Sade,



was copied from an ancient picture in the house of Sade, of which the colours were almost defaced by time. The Abbé thus describes it: “ On conserve à Avignon  
“ dans la maison de Sade, un ancien portrait de Laure, qui pourroit bien être une  
“ copie de celui que Simon fit à la réquisition de Pétrarque. Dans ce portrait,  
“ Laure vêtue de rouge, tenant une fleur  
“ à la main, présente une physionomie  
“ modeste, douce, et même un peu tendre :  
“ C’est à quoi fait allusion le sonnet suivant, *Quand giunse a Simon l’ alto concetto,*  
“ &c.” The Abbé informs us, that most of the pictures of Laura, which are to be seen in France and Italy, have been copied from this portrait. An engraved outline of it will be found at p. 220 of the preceding Essay.

In the same work, the *Petrarca Rediviv-*

*rus*, the author, in describing the poet's house or villa, at Arquà, in which he died, mentions two portraits of Petrarch and Laura, which the proprietor of the house preserved with the utmost care, along with several articles of Petrarch's household furniture; in particular, a chair of an extraordinary form, and a book-press, with an effigy in stone or marble, of the poet's *Cat*; to whose memory, Antonius Quærensus, *poeta eximius*, addressed two Latin epigrams, *paris elegantia*; which, by the providence of Marc-Antonio Gabrieli (*Marci-Antonii Gabrielis providentia*), were cut upon the stone pedestal. In one of these *elegant* epigrams, the poet is said to have been inflamed with two rival passions, the one for his *cat*, and the other for *Laura*; but the former the most violent of the

two; *Maximus ignis ego, Laura secundus erat.*—Of the *chair*, the *press*, and the *cat*, the learned bishop has favoured his readers with exact engravings on wood and copper.

Among the other curiosities of Arqua, mentioned by the same writer, is a marble fountain, from whence, as the inscription informs us, the poet drew copious draughts of immortal song: *Unde bibens cecinit digna Petrarca Deis.* I notice it here, for the sake of a truly elegant and classical epigram, by Marc-Antonio Romiti, of which this fountain is the subject; and which must give pleasure to every reader of taste:

Lumina vix puero nascenti adaperta Petrarcae,

Vix tenero vitæ limina pressa pede,

Cum mihi perpetuos, ut primùm adoleverit ætas,

Hæc debent luctus lumina, dixit amor.



Ecce ubi tempus adest, lacrymæ labuntur amaræ

Continuè ex oculis, more perennis aquæ.

Scilicet objicitur juveni pulcherrima rerum,

Perpetui fletûs causa, puella sui.

At longos miserata nimis Libitina labores,

Pallenti clausit lumina fessa manu.

Risit Amor, furtim et subductos condit ocellos,

Non procul a tumulo, magne Petrarcha, tuo.

Jussit et irriguos lymphâ manare perenni,

Fallere et urentes cætera membra rogos.

Splendide fons, miseros semper testabere amantes

Ponere nec lacrymis funere posse modum.

The marble monument which was erected at Arqua, to the memory of Petrarch, by his son-in-law and heir, Franciscolo de Brossano, is likewise minutely described by Tomasini, in the same work, and the description illustrated by an engraving. The monument bears the following Monkish inscription :—

Frigida Francisci lapis hic tegit ossa Petrarçæ;  
 Suscipe virgo parens animam, sate virgine parce,  
 Fessaque jam terris coeli requiescat in arce.

M.CCC.LXXIIII. 18. Julii.

Tomasini adds, that a brazen head of the poet was put upon this monument, near two centuries after this date, by the proprietor of Petrarch's villa: "Paulus Val-  
 "dazucchus Patavinus ædium olim Pe-  
 "trarchæ dominus, vivum ejus vultum ex  
 "ære ductum, huic ipsi sepulchro super-  
 "posuit, adjectâ tabellâ hisce literarum  
 "notis:"

Fr. Petrarchæ Paulus Valdazucchus, poematum  
 ejus admirator,

Ædium agrique possessor, hanc effigiem posuit,

An. 1567. Idib. Sept.

Abraham Golnitz, in his itinerary, in-  
 titled *Ulysses Belgico-Gallicus*, in descri-

bing the little town of Arqua, in the district of Padua, mentions this brazen effigy on the tomb of Petrarch; and takes notice likewise of a painting, in the public hall of the town, in which Petrarch is represented in a studious posture, and Laura standing by him.

Tomasini, who seems to have explored with the most enthusiastic eagerness, every trace of Petrarch and of Laura, visited the house at Padua, in which the Poet occasionally resided; and he mentions a picture, in fresco, of Petrarch, which had once stood there, but had been removed by an admirer of the poet, and was still preserved with the utmost care: “*Lustravimus illam (domum) attentis utique oculis diligenter.—Poetæ quoque effigies conspiciebatur ibidem in muro pic-*



“ta, quam ob artificii præstantiam muro  
“exsectam, bonæ memoriæ, cl. vir. Io.  
“Bapt. Silvaticus Eques et Juris Canon.  
“Professor in suas ædes transferendam cu-  
“ravit, eamque non minori curâ inibi  
“conservat Frater Benedictus Eques.”  
*Petrarch Rediviv.* p. 169.

Tomasini has likewise given an engraving of a brass or copper medal, exhibiting the face of Petrarch, in profile, which has a considerable resemblance to the marble sculpture, supposed the work of Simon o Sienna, which was found in the house of Signor Peruzzi, at Florence; and, on the reverse of this medal, is a female figure representative of Laura, in the attitude of dressing or pruning a laurel.

In the splendid edition of the *Rime del Petrarca*, published at Venice in 1756,

with the commentary of Castelvetro, in two volumes quarto, which is embellished with a great number of very beautiful allegorical vignettes, is a frontispiece, engraved by Crivellari, containing three portraits of Petrarch, Laura, and Castelvetro. The heads of Petrarch and of Laura are said to be copied from two *ancient originals*, by the hand of Gentile Bellini, which remain, as the description informs us, *nella casa Patrizia Nani di Venezia, in Canareggio*. But this account is undoubtedly inaccurate: for either these portraits are not originals, (that is, actually taken from the life) or they are the work of a different painter; for Gentile Bellini, as we learn from Vasari, was not born till 1421; that is forty-seven years after the death of Petrarch, and seventy-

three years after the death of Laura. The pictures, however, if we may judge from the engravings, have all the appearance of an early age, and may have been copied by Bellini, from genuine originals. In the figure of Laura, the air, the dress, and *costume*, resemble most of those portraits which are prefixed to the older editions of the *Rime del Petrarca*; though the face is fuller and more in front. The downcast eyes, the rounded contour of the visage, and the triangular ornament on the forehead, seem to be peculiar to the portraits of Laura.

One of the best portraits of Petrarch which I have ever seen, and which has all the marks of a very early age, is a small head, on pannel, in the collection of the Earl of Ancram, at Newbattle-Abbey.



The dress is the ordinary *costume* of the poet; a close hood of silk, of a light carnation colour; a brown velvet or cloth tippet, with a border of fur under the chin, and a white linen cassock: the brow encircled with a slender twig of laurel. The expression of the countenance is serene and thoughtful; and the features are similar to those of the frontispiece to the present essay.

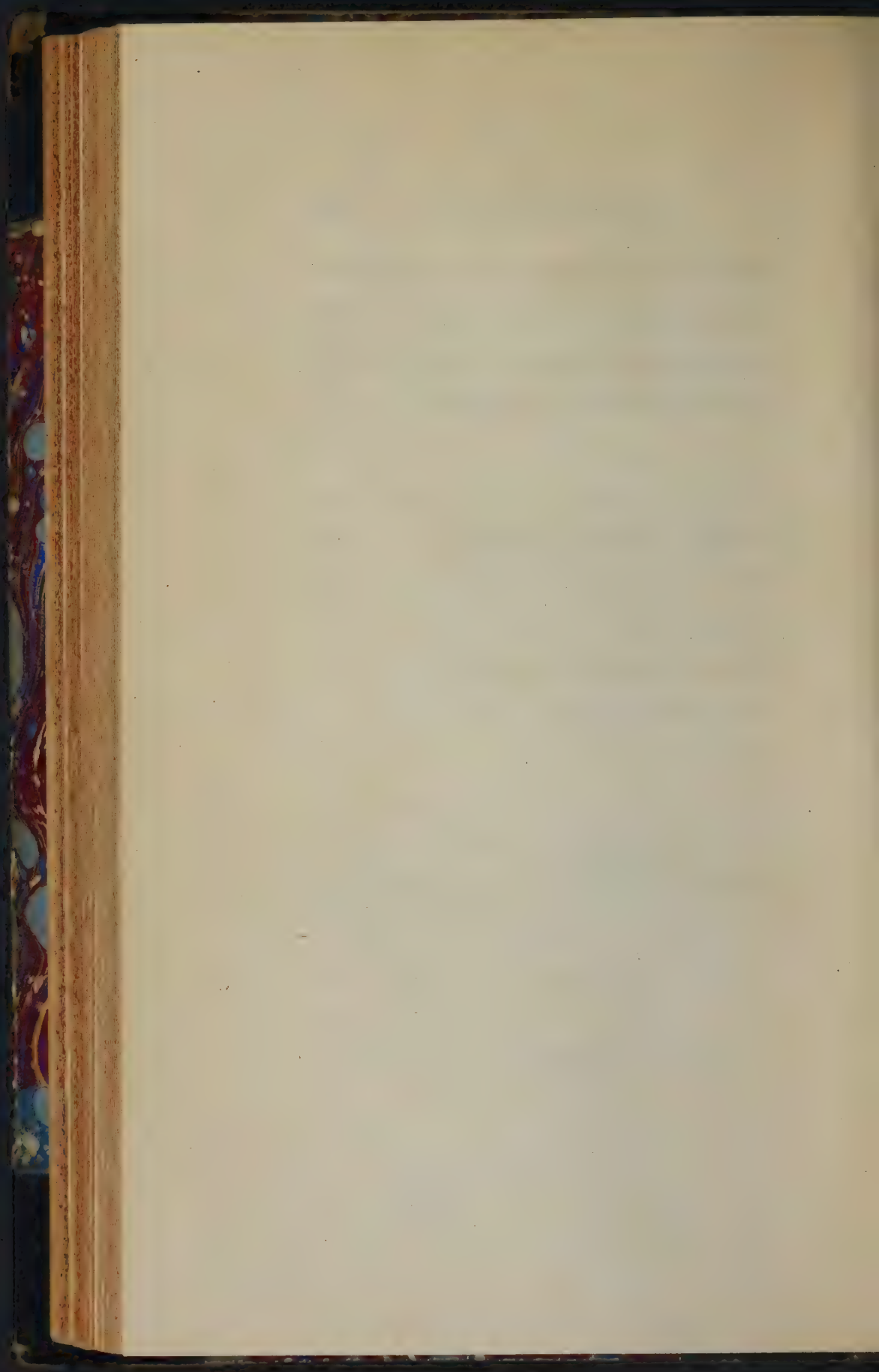
A head of Petrarch, with a strong and characteristic expression of talents and genius, but considerably different in features from all the other portraits of the poet, is prefixed to the small edition of the *Rime*, printed at Paris, 1768, in two volumes 12mo. The engraver has subjoined his own name, *Littret. delt. & sc.* but there is no name of a painter.

From those characteristic peculiarities of countenance and dress, though the inscription were wanting, we should recognise the picture from which the engraving of Laura, in the present work, is taken, to be a genuine portrait. The original is a painting on pannel, which is in the possession of Sir Alexander Muir Mackenzie of Delvin, in the county of Perth; to whose friendship the author is indebted for the permission he politely gave to have it engraved. The picture was brought from Italy, many years ago, by an ancestor of the family; and is probably one of the oldest existing portraits of Laura. The style and execution bear the marks of an early period of the art of painting.

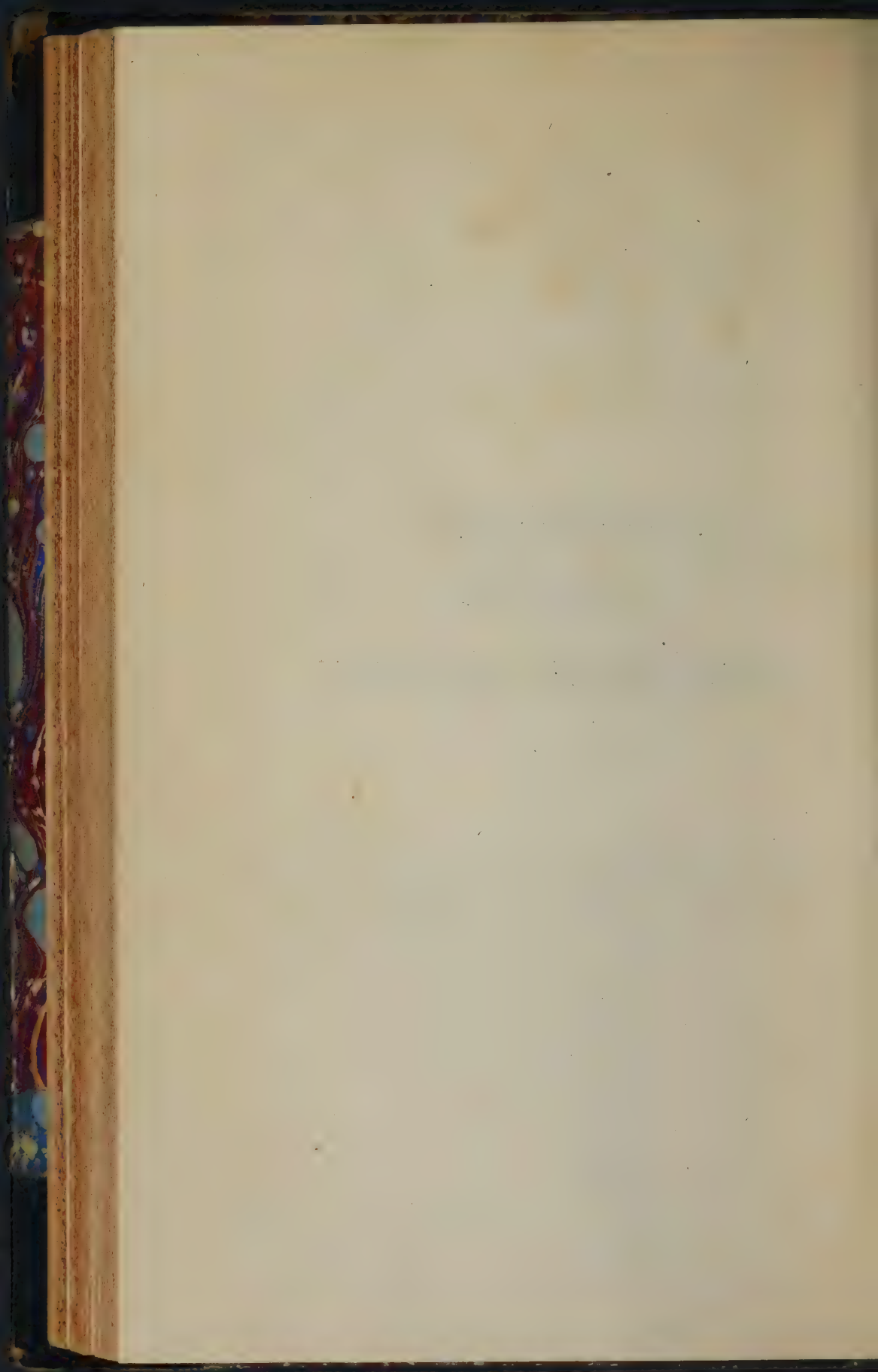
The head of Petrarch, which is the

frontispiece to this Essay, (engraved by a very able artist,) is copied from an excellent print, by Raphael Morghen, after a portrait of the poet, by Raphael.





TRANSLATION  
OF A FEW OF THE  
SONNETS OF PETRARCH.





TRANSLATION  
OF A FEW OF THE  
SONNETS OF PETRARCH,

REFERRED TO IN THE PRECEDING ESSAY.

---

SONNET 251.

*Quand 'io veggio dal ciel scender l'Aurora.*

---

WHEN from the east, appears the purple ray  
Of morn arising, and salutes the eyes  
That wear the night in watching for the day,  
Thus speaks my heart : " In yonder opening skies,  
" In yonder fields of bliss, my Laura lies !"

Thou sun, that know'st to wheel thy burning car,  
Each even, to the still surface of the deep,  
And there within thy Thetis' bosom sleep;  
Oh! could I thus my *Laura's* presence share,  
How would my patient heart its sorrows bear!

Ador'd in life, and honour'd in the dust,  
She that in this fond breast for ever reigns  
Has pass'd the gulph of death!—To deck that bust,  
No trace of her, but the sad name, remains.

SONNET 48.

Written upon GOOD FRIDAY.

*Padre del Ciel! dopo i perduti giorni.*

---

FATHER of Heaven! in this my lost estate,  
After this lavish waste of days and years,  
Thus madly spent in struggling with my fate,  
Sharp'ning the dart which still my bosom tears:

O lend thy aid, thy heavenly light impart;  
Point out the path of life; unveil my eyes;  
Let my tormentress see my alter'd heart,  
And scorn to persecute so poor a prize!

Now runs the eleventh year of hopeless love;  
Years lost to life! how long those years of pain,  
Which to the willing slave severer prove,  
Since no submission cures her fierce disdain!

O God! reclaim at length my soul to Thee,  
Who dy'dst upon the Cross, this day, to set me free



SONNET 132.

*Hor, che'l Ciel, e la terra, e'l vento tace.*

---

'Tis now the hour when midnight silence reigns  
 O'er earth and sea, and whisp'ring Zephyr dies  
 Within his rocky cell: and Morpheus chains  
 Each beast that roams the wood, and bird that  
 wings the skies.

More blest those rangers of the earth and air,  
 Whom night a while relieves from toil and pain:  
 Condemn'd to tears, and sighs, and wasting care,  
 To me the circling sun descends in vain!

Ah me! that mingling miseries and joys  
 Too near allied, from one sad fountain flow;  
 The magic hand that comforts and annoys,  
 Can hope and fell despair, and life and death  
 bestow!

Too great the bliss to find in death relief:  
 Fate has not yet fill'd up the measure of my grief.

SONNET 141.

*Fera stella' (se'l cielo ha forza in noi.)*

---

ILL-OMEN'D was that star's malignant gleam  
That rul'd my hapless birth; and dim the morn  
That darted on my infant eyes its beam;  
And harsh the wail, that told a man was born;  
And hard the sterile earth, which first was worn  
Beneath my infant-feet; but harder far,  
And harsher still the tyrant maid, whose scorn,  
In league with savage Love, inflam'd the war  
Of all my passions.—Love himself more tame,  
With pity soothes my ills; while that cold heart,  
Insensible to the devouring flame  
Which wastes my vitals, triumphs in my smart.  
One thought is comfort—That her scorn to bear,  
Excels even prosperous love, with other earthly  
fair.

SÓNNET 213.

Written in the last Sickness of Laura.

*Qual paura hò, quando mi torna à mente.*

---

O LAURA ! when my tortur'd mind  
The sad remembrance bears  
Of that ill-omen'd day,  
When victim to a thousand doubts and fears,  
I left my soul behind,  
That soul that could not from its partner stray ;  
In nightly visions to my longing eyes  
Thy form oft seems to rise,  
As ever thou wert seen,  
Fair like the rose, 'midst paling flowers the queen.  
But loosely in the wind,  
Unbraided wave the ringlets of thy hair,  
That late with studious care,  
I saw with pearls and flow'ry garlands twin'd :  
On thy wan lip, no cheerful smile appears ;  
Thy beauteous face a tender sadness wears ;



Placid in pain thou seem'st, serene in grief,  
As conscious of thy fate, and hopeless of relief!  
Cease, cease, presaging heart! O angels, deign  
To hear my fervent prayer, that all my fears be  
vain!

SONNET 253.

*Gli occhi di ch' io parlai sì caldamente.*

---

THOSE eyes whose living lustre shed the heat  
 Of bright meridian day; the heavenly mould  
 Of that angelic form; the hands, the feet,  
 The taper arms, the crisped locks of gold;  
 Charms that the sweets of paradise enfold;  
 The radiant lightning of her angel-smile,  
 And every grace that could the sense beguile  
 Are now a pile of ashes, deadly cold!

And yet I bear to drag this cumbrous chain,  
 That weighs my soul to earth—to bliss or pain  
 Alike insensible:—Her anchor lost,  
 The frail dismantled bark, all tempest-tost,  
 Surveys no port of comfort—closed the scene  
 Of life's delusive joys;—and dry the Muse's vein.

SONNET 260.

*Quanta invidia ti porto avara terra.*

---

O EARTH, whose clay-cold mantle shrouds that face,  
And veils those eyes that late so brightly shone,  
Whence all that gave delight on earth was known,  
How much I envy thee that harsh embrace !

O Heaven, that in thy airy courts confin'd  
That purest spirit, when from earth she fled,  
And sought the mansions of the righteous dead ;  
How envious ! thus to leave my panting soul behind !

O angels, that in your seraphic choir  
Receiv'd her sister-soul, and now enjoy  
Still present, those delights without alloy,  
Which my fond heart must still in vain desire !

In her I liv'd—in her my life decays ;  
Yet envious fate denies to end my hapless days.



SONNET 261.

On the Prospect of Vaucluse.

*Valle che de lamenti miei se' piena.*

---

THOU lonely vale, where in the fleeting years  
 Of tender youth, I breath'd my amorous pain :  
 Thou brook, whose silver stream receiv'd my tears,  
 Thy murmurs joining to my sorrowing strain ;  
 I come, to visit all my former haunts again !

O green-clad hills, familiar to my sight !  
 O well-known paths, where oft I wont to rove,  
 Musing the tender accents of my love !  
 Long use, and sad remembrance, now invite  
 Again to view the scenes which once could give  
 delight.

Yes, ye are still the same ! though here I meet  
 No more that angel-form which beauty shed  
 On universal nature ! her dear feet  
 Oft trod your paths ;—here rests in hallow'd  
 earth her head !

SONNET 270.

*Zefiro torna, e'l bel tempo ramena.*

---

THE spring returns, and all her smiling train ;  
The wanton Zephyrs breathe along the bowers,  
The glistening dew-drops hang on bending flowers,  
And tender green light-shadows o'er the plain :

And thou, sweet Philomel, renew'st thy strain,  
Breathing thy wild notes to the midnight grove :  
All nature feels the kindling fire of love,  
The vital force of spring's returning reign.

But not to me returns the chearful spring !  
O heart ! that know'st no period to thy grief ;  
Nor Nature's smiles to thee impart relief,  
Nor change of mind the varying seasons bring :

She, she is gone ! All that e'er pleas'd before,  
Adieu ! ye birds, ye flowers, ye fields that charm  
no more !

SONNET 279.

*Sento l'aura mia antica; e i dolci colli:*

---

ONCE more I breathe that sweet accustom'd air ;  
 I view those hills, dear regions of delight ;  
 Whence rose the beam that erewhile shone so fair,  
 While Heaven so pleas'd to bless me with her  
 sight.

But now, for ever gone that rapturous dream :  
 All blank the prospect—darkly low'rs the day :  
 Widow'd are those green fields, disturb'd the  
 stream ;  
 And void and cold the nest in which she lay !

Yet here I wander ; here my only trust  
 Of rest and peace still harbours—here at last,  
 The scene once clos'd, life's airy vision past,  
 I hope to sleep, forgotten in the dust.

I've serv'd a rigorous master : all my meed,  
 Torment while living,—and oblivion dead !



SONNET 287.

*Ite rime dolenti, al duro sasso.*

---

Go, melancholy rhymes ! your tribute bring  
To that cold stone, which holds the dear remains  
Of all that earth held precious ;—uttering,  
If heaven should deign to hear them, earthly  
    strains.

Tell her, that sport of tempests, fit no more  
To stem the troublous ocean,—here at last  
Her votary treads the solitary shore ;  
His only pleasure to recall the past.

Tell her, that she who living rul'd his fate,  
In death still holds her empire : all his care,  
So grant the Muse her aid,—to celebrate  
Her every word, and thought, and action fair.

Be this my meed, that in the hour of death  
Her kindred spirit may hail, and bless my parting  
    breath !

SONNET I.

But more properly the last of the *Rime del Petrarca*.

*Voi ch' ascoltate in rime sparse il suono.*

---

YE, that with favouring ear, and feeling heart,  
 'Sdeign not to list to these disorder'd rhimes,  
 Which the full sorrows of my soul impart,  
 Whilst, error-led, in those past early times,  
 I cherish'd in my breast th' impoison'd dart:

For these poor trifles which the Muse inspir'd,  
 Alternate birth of fleeting hope, and pain,  
 From you, whose hearts a kindred flame has fir'd,  
 Should pardon be denied, I trust to gain

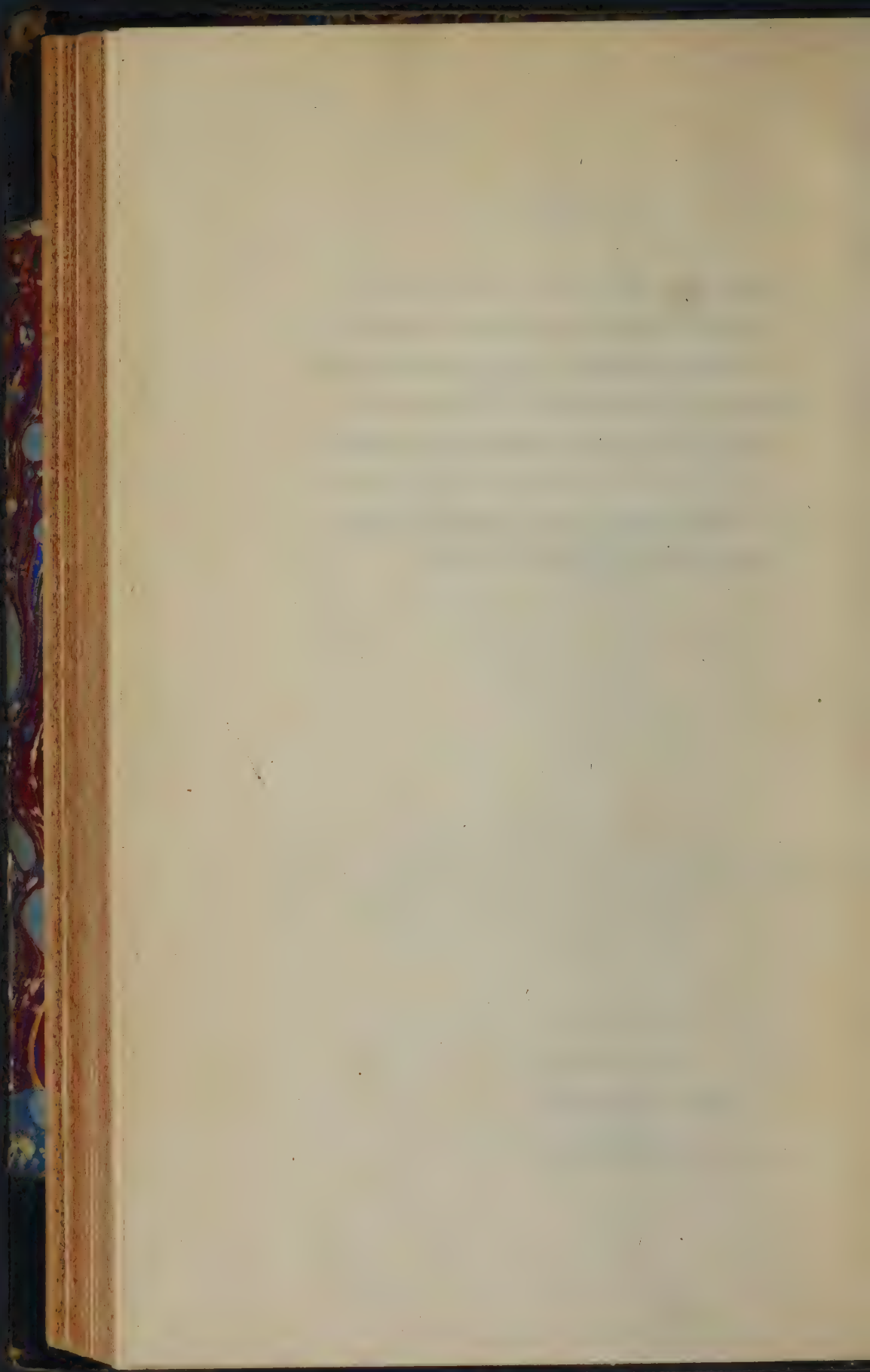
At least compassion. <sup>2</sup>—Late, at length I know,  
That, as, through many a year, the bitter scorn  
And taunting speech of men I've meanly borne,  
And reap'd alone the fruits of shame and woe ;  
So this sad truth remains,—that all is vain below !

---

<sup>1</sup> A little liberty is here taken with the original.  
“ *Spero trovar pietà, non che perdona.*”

THE END.





## CORRECTIONS.

P. 56, line 5 of the note, for "*St Clair*," read "*Ste Claire*."

P. 68, line 9 from the bottom, for "*was*," read "*is*."

P. 87, line 11, after "read it," put a colon, and add,  
"as for example:

*Maritus Liviae mœrens jussit—*

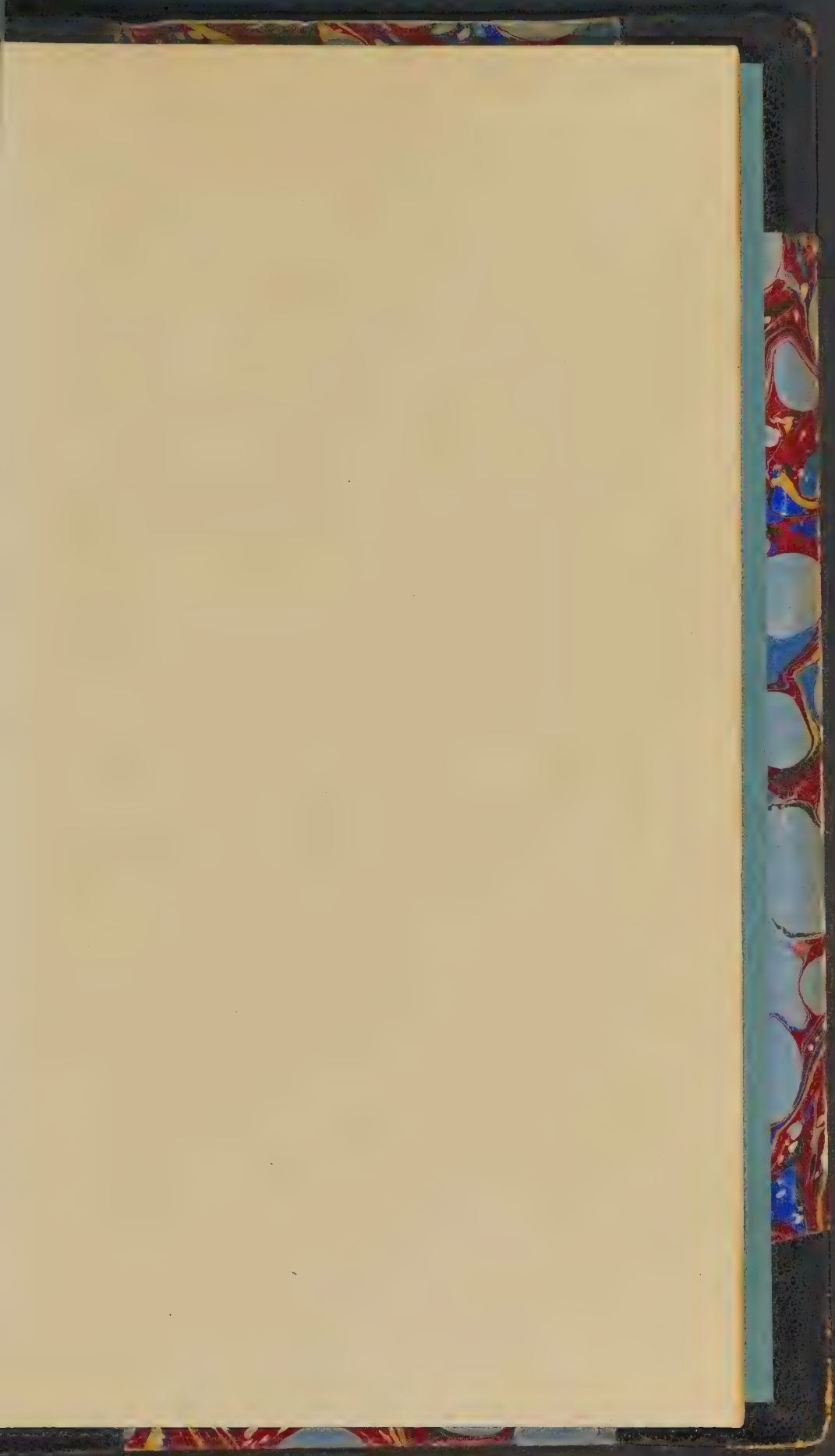
*Mater Lucretiæ monumentum jussit—*

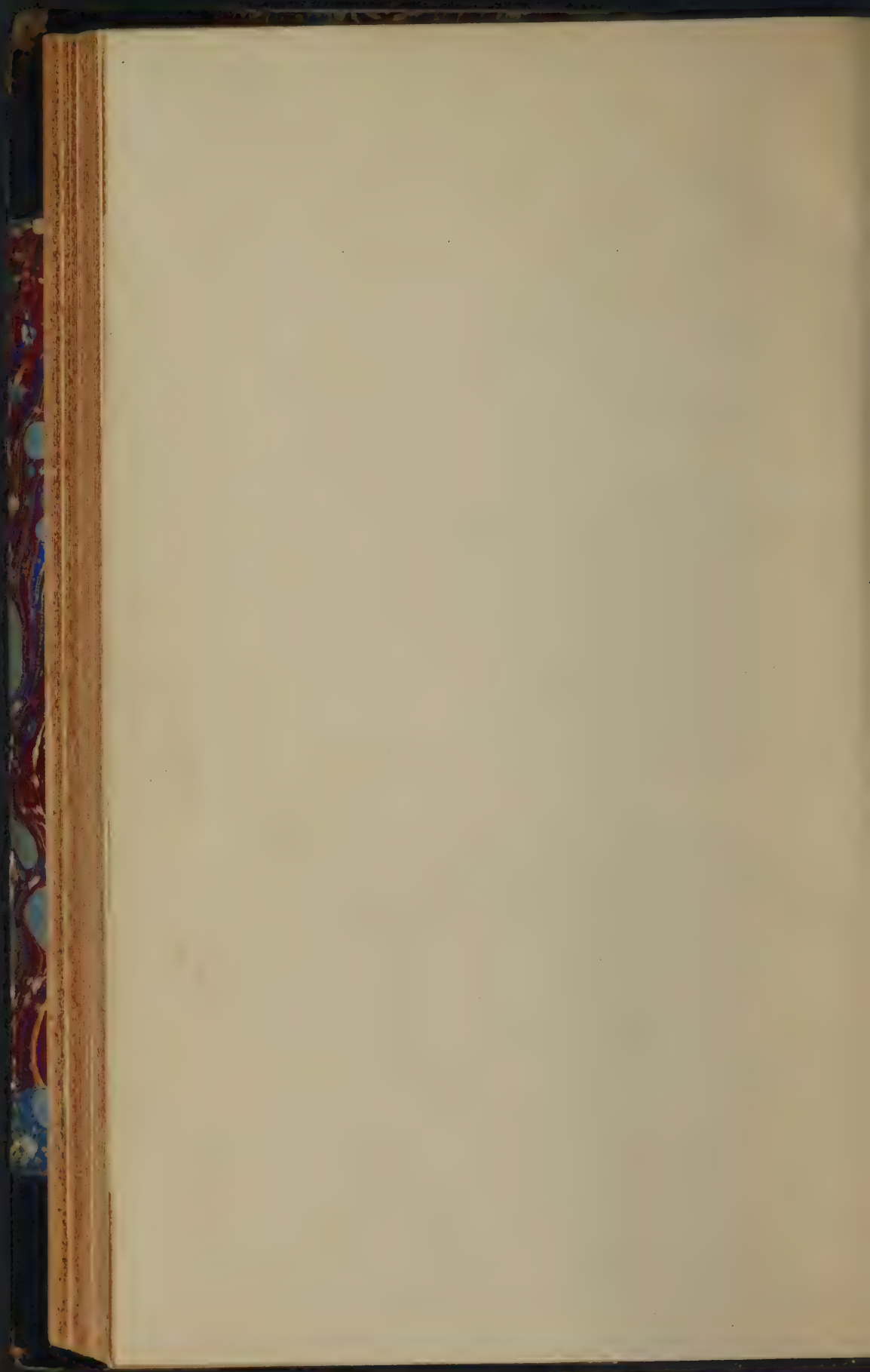
*Meritò lugens mater jussit, &c."*

N. B. At page 31, the author has quoted the authority of Senuccio del Bene, for an account of the ceremony of Petrarch's coronation in the Capitol; having seen that account referred to as authentic, by Crescembeni, Menage, Tomasini, P. Nicéron, and many other writers. Beccadelli, however, in his *Life of Petrarch*, treats it as a fabrication; and the Abbé de Sade has, in one of his notes, (N. xiv.) completely exposed the imposture, from the intrinsic evidence of false dates and anachronisms, as well as the manifest absurdities of which the account is full. A brief detail of the actual ceremony of Petrarch's coronation, which was abundantly splendid, is given in the beginning of the 3d book of the *Mémoires pour la vie de Pétrarque*.

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